ゼロの使い魔 16

〈ド・オルニエールの安穏（ティータイム）〉

ヤマグチノボル

MF文庫 J

Novel Illustrations

ヤマグチノボル（やまぐち・のぼる）

1972年2月、茨城県生まれ。『カナリア～この想いを歌にのせて』（角川スニーカー文庫）でデビュー。著書に『魔法薬売りのマレア　千日カゲロウ』『ストライクウィッチーズ』（角川スニーカー文庫）『描きかけのラブレター』『遠く6マイルの彼女』（富士見ミステリー文庫）『サンタ・クラリス・クライシス』（富士見ファンタジア文庫）『ゼロの使い魔』（MF文庫J）など多数。『グリーングリーン』『Gonna Be??』『ゆきうた』『私立アキハバラ学園』『魔界天使ジブリール』『そらうた』など、ゲームシナリオライターとしても活躍中。

Illustration

◎兎塚エイジ（うさつか・えいじ）

8月16日生まれ。大阪出身、大阪在住の大阪人。
現在、サラリーマンをしながらイラストを描かせて頂いてます。
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「ゼロの使い魔」（MF文庫J）
などです。
初のイラスト集「兎塚エイジ Zéro ゼロの使い魔イラストコレクション」（メディアファクトリー）も好評発売中。

カバーイラスト／兎塚エイジ　装丁／blue

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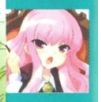

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ゼロの使い魔16 ド・オルニエール(ティータイム)の安穏

様々な思いと策謀が絡んだガリア王ジョゼフとの戦いが終わって、才人たちは学園へと戻ってきた。全生徒の前で表彰され、アンリエッタからの褒美をさずかった水精霊騎士隊の面々は、それぞれ人気を取り戻して、幸せな時を過ごしていた。才人とルイズも、ふたりだけの世界に浸り……たかったのだが、シエスタがくっついて離れない。約束したお屋敷探しにも口を出されて、ルイズはご立腹。「メイドは雇わずって言ったでしょーっっ！」一方その頃、ガリアの女王となったタバサは、慣れない生活を送りながら、ロマリアの陰謀に立ち向かう決意を固めていた。冒険ファンタジー16弾！

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ゼロの使い魔1～16
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ゼロの使い魔 16

〈ド・オルニエールの安穏（ティータイム）〉

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ゼロの使い魔16
ド・オルニエールの安穏（ティータイム）

ヤマグチノボル

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Chapter 1: The Reward of the Campaign

"This war was definitely a harsh one. The war was started by the former King of Gallia, Joseph. His conspiracy included turning not only Romalia, but also the entire Halkeginia continent into ashes."

Osman's voice resounded throughout the hall.

This is the main tower, the second floor of the magic academy's dancing hall. Students who were dressed nicely were listening to Osman's speech meekly.

When the sudden war between Romalia and Gallia was started, they fell in horror. Since the war between Albion had just ended, their hometown was in a desperate situation.

They were in no shape for war.

What if the crazy Gallian King suddenly attacked them? They would have been destroyed in a heartbeat.

However, this ended. In the battle of Carcassonne, King Joseph died fighting. In an instant, a new queen was crowned and the war was over.

"We fell in horror. I didn't want to become ashes, I mean, don't you want to live longer? If I had become ashes, I wouldn't have been able to pet female hips. That's something I can't live without. All of you here also feel the same way, right?"

The hall became silent. Osman, after faking a cough, continued.

"However, God did not leave us! If there's a crazy king, there must be a hero! If there's a crazy conspiracy, then there's a justice that would defeat it! These

people, are the ones who destroyed the ambition of that crazy king!"

The students gulped.

Yes... The ones who helped earn this victory were none other than...

"Yes! The stupid conspiracy by that crazy king was stopped by these heroes! By the heroes whom you all know well! Let me introduce them!"

With Osman's signal, a silk curtain behind him fell. The students cheered loudly.

"These people are the ones who saved this world! The knights of Ondine and the Shrine Maidens of our Founder!"

There, there were the knights of Ondine in formal attires along with Louise and Tiffania. Amidst cheers such as "Woooooh!", "Hooray knights of Ondine!", and "Hooray Tiffania!", the boys and girls blushed out of honor and shyness.

The students at the academy were made to realize that the knights who go to the same academy as they do have done tremendous achievements in this war.

"Listen students. Though it was their first experience in battle, they've achieved quite a lot. Destroying those strong golems on Tiger Road, the one on one on Linen River, and Joseph's unimaginable... huge fireball that used the magic of the elves, those fires that destroyed the huge fleet... it is said that it was all stopped due to their achievements!"

Cheers roared even more.

The accomplishments of the Knights, especially the vice commander Chevalier de Hiraga's, were passed down to everybody.

This was the first instance in which a single knight and his group of knights led a victory in war. Moreover, rumors say that the new queen is Tabitha, who was recently a student just like them. Although nobody knew what kind of drama occurred, the knights of Ondine must have played a part in helping Tabitha becoming the queen.

The beautiful... glorious victory's outcome.

And the fact that they had connections to the new queen of Gallia. The students of the academy felt unmeasurable happiness because they were studying at the same exact schools as the heroes, and were very close in age.

The knights of Ondine guarded the new queen Charlotte to the capital of Gallia, Lutèce, from Carcassonne along with the Romalian army, and went into the castle.

The citizens of Gallia welcomed them with great cheers.

After that, they guarded her Majesty Queen Henrietta to Tristain, and finally came back.

"Hooray for the Ondine!"

Osman stood in front of the boys and congratulated every one of them.

"Yes yes, I feel honored as if I am you all. Since you guys are me! I, the principal of this magic academy have raised you single handedly... yes yes!"

Osman nodded happily as he congratulated.

"I raised you all, yes yes!"

The knights of Ondine looked at each other. *It's true that the principal is the principal, but did he even teach us anything? Did he raise us?* They made such faces. Along with this, other students' cheers slowly faded.

"Y.. yes! It's all thanks to your teachings!"

The clever Guiche took Osman's side. "It's not a bad thing to lend Osman a favor or two."

Then, Osman sharply observed Guiche, then went near him.

"Guiche..."

"Yes! Old Osman!"

Expecting some sort of medal, Guiche stood as perfect as he could.

"You are a very nice student. I'll give you a prize."

Guiche shook with happiness. Not only did he already receive a medal at Albion, he is about to have another big honor. What will it be? Will it be the treasure wand made of gold and diamond tips that is only given to the top student of the academy? If he does receive such a treasure, it's as if his path for success is already promised...

However, Osman's words betrayed Guiche's thoughts.

"You can hug me."

Osman said it straightforwardly.

"Excuse me?"

However, Osman continued to pull Guiche towards him with his thumb. Guiche shook his head.

Next was Saito.

"You can hug me."

Saito shook his head without uttering a single word. Then Reynal.

"You can hug me."

Reynal, whose face showed mild anger, whispered "Don't mess around with us. You make fun of... our pride... and honor.... Why you..."

Though he tried to talk back to Osman, it was too late. At that time, Osman was already talking to Adrian next to him. He is Reynal's classmate and has short red hair.

He shook his head before even being asked for a hug. Then, Osman went to the next knights: Alsenu, Guston, Varantun, Victor, Paul, Ernesto, Oscar, and Gazmeal.

Every one of them declined Osman’s offer. Not a single person wanted to hug Osman. Nor did they understand why they had to. Amidst the awkward tension

surrounding the knights of Ondine, Osman came towards the final one, Malicorne.

Malicorne, without waiting for Osman to ask for a hug, immediately said,

"Okay!"

Osman, after staring at Malicorne for a little then said, "Well, leaving the jokes aside..." Reynal who was about to jump Osman was stopped by his fellow knights.

"The government gave all of you honor befitting your performances."

Ms. Chevreuse, who was dressed in formal attire just like the knights of Ondine appeared. She had something in her hand. The knights of Ondine, when seeing what she held, widened their eyes out of surprise. There was black writing along with a silver pentagon, shining across.

"Is this... the cape for a Chevalier!?"

Guiche exclaimed.

"Yes. The achievements of the knights of Ondine in this war are enough for the captain Guiche to be recognized as ‘Chevalier’"

That was true. Although Saito was the one who did all the achievements, the ones who joined the Gallian Royalty War (what it is called by everybody) were only the knights of Ondine. The least the government could have done to reward them was to give a ‘Chevalier’. In other words, if Tristain didn't bother giving a title like this, the people would start questioning Tristain's ways of thinking. Politically speaking, this Chevalier was definitely needed.

Guiche, shaking, humbly accepted the cape. The knights congratulated Guiche.

"You did it, captain!"

"Now we have two Chevaliers in our knight of Ondine!"

"And also, though we can't give you all Chevalier, you all deserve a medal. It's the Medal of White Hair Soul."

Then, Mr. Gito appeared. As always, he seemed unfriendly. In his heart, he was jealous that his students were getting medals.

"Well, one can say you did sort of good. Take it."

With a bored look, he hung the medals around the knights' necks. Proudly, the kids smiled. It wasn't just honor. Having a Soul Medal also gives annual money. For those knights who barely have any pay, this was pretty big.

After the medals were handed out, Osman stood in front of the two girls, Louise and Tiffania.

"Well, since you two came as shrine maidens, we apparently aren’t allowed to give medals to you. Well, that kind of makes sense since those are medals designed for soldiers. However, from the Tristain Church, you two have received a certificate of the Juno priest. They apparently had exactly two seats open."

The students sighed. To receive a certificate of a priest is the gateway towards being rich. Since if one becomes a priest, almost all taxes are free, and in reverse one can gain parts of the church taxes. Therefore, with that certificate, one can gain money by doing nothing. Though it's not a lot of money due to them being ordinary priestesses, it couldn't be compared to the annual pay of a single medal.

To do a rough count, Guiche has about 500 Écu, the other knights about 200 Écu, and Louise and Tiffania about 800 Écu promised of annual pay.

Loud claps rang throughout the hall. However, everybody suddenly realized.

Saito is the only one who didn't receive anything. Thinking that there should be something special for Saito later on, Osman declared the start of the party.

Well, he did receive the Chevalier last time... Maybe he was just an extra this time... The crowd accepted this illogical reasoning.

A huge banquet came after. Around the knights of Ondine, students gathered.

"Lord Guiche! Please tell us about your achievements on the battlefield!"

"Sure sure, ask me anything."

Going with the flow, he started talking about the battle... but then Guiche realized a girl was looking at Guiche from a distance.

"Montmorency..."

However, Montmorency looked away and walked towards the exit of the party. Guiche, immediately pushed away the students around him and chased after her.

Montmorency was standing right outside the hall, facing the opposite side of where Guiche stood. She wouldn't move an inch.

Guiche walked towards her back, fixed his attire and then said to Montmorency, who was still not facing Guiche:

"I became a Chevalier."

"....."

Montmorency stayed completely silent. Guiche tried to walk further towards her, but stopped.

"Well, I know. I completely understand. It's not me; it's all Saito who did it. He's really great guy. I just happened to be the leader."

Guiche raised his head.

"But... I'll definitely become a man worthy of my new cape. I'll also be the man worthy of you..... Well, see you later."

Guiche walked back towards the hall.

"Wait!"

Montmorency screamed. As Guiche turned back to face her, she ran into his chest.

"Montmo..."

"I... I'm stupid. Even though I know you’re the type that moves around with

girls, once you say something nice, I suddenly think you’re amazing."

Guiche cheered in his heart.

"I promise not to look at baths."

"And... I despised myself. I worried a lot. Since the war just started out of no where... I thought you'd die before we'd even get a chance to make up..."

Montmorency, being a little modest, started crying. Seeing this, even Guiche felt bad and saddened. Guiche took something from his pocket and handed it to Montmorency.

"What?"

"I was also thinking about you. I made it by carving a seashell. In Romalia, you apparently give this to women."

On the sea shell was the side view of a woman.

"I made it while thinking about you."

"It's beautiful... I never knew you were so crafty."

With a romantic expression, Montmorency looked at Guiche. They both closed their eyes.... and as their lips got closer... several girls came jumping out of the hall and screamed:

"Guiche! Thanks for such a fantastic carving!"

Montmorency opened her eyes widely, and pushed Guiche away.

"Well... As I was making them, it became so fun that I just unintentionally made many of those..."

"Very crafty, huh? Are you sure accessories aren't the only thing you 'unintentionally make'?"

Montmorency turned around and walked away.

"Malicorne! Please tell us more of the stories!"

With a few girls surrounding him, Malicorne was literally crying of joy.

It couldn't have been helped, since after that incident with the knights of Ondine peeking at the girl's bath, their fame dropped down to the ground. It dropped so far that Saito's achievement in Albion, and the fight against Beatriz's dragon knights were completely forgotten.

However, their fame was finally restored.

Going along with the mood, Malicorne happily chattered. In front of him, a clear black-haired girl came upon him.

"Brigitta..."

Malicorne's body froze. After staying shy for a little while, Brigitta finally said, "You made it back safely..."

Realizing the two's mood, the girls surrounding Malicorne left. Malicorne, opened his arms widely like a lead actor in an opera and said grandly, even though he's only a fat kid:

"I was thinking about you all this time."

"I also was thinking about you all this time."

The two stared at each other. Then, Brigitta spoke out softly.

"My friend told me that since you aren't normal, I should bare with some things, or else I won't last."

"... Sorry..."

"It's fine..... While you were at war, I was thinking all this time. Since you’re someone like that, it's normal for you to peek at the girl's bath. No, I'd rather be thankful that that's all you did, so I'll bear with it. So, I'm very sorry for what I said to you before."

She said so in such a brave way that Malicorne felt sorry for what he had done.

He realized how much he was living only for his own greed after seeing her cry like this.

"Sorry.... I'm sorry; I seemed to have gone past what I should have done with my sexual desires. From this point on, I'll be normal. I promise. I won't want for you to be sadistic on me anymore. I won't be fat."

Brigitta, feeling grateful, looked at Malicorne. Seeing those two, a girl gave them each a glass of wine.

"Why don't you two drink a glass since you guys are making up?"

The two smiled and drank the glass. They looked at each other, and laughed.

"Here, drink more."

Malicorne offered Brigitta more.

"I'm not good with alcohol."

"Today is special; since it's the day I have gone through a rebirth."

Brigitta finally tipped her wine glass. As she did so, she said things like 'Wow, I'm starting to feel drunk' so Malicorne took her to the balcony.

"Are you okay?"

"This pig... made me feel drunk."

Malicorne heard a nostalgic word.

"Wh.. what did you just say?"

"This pig made me feel drunk."

Malicorne felt this unexplainable nerve signal running through his head to his toes.

"P-pig... Me?"

"Yes, where else is there such a pig?"

Brigitta's eyes were already swaying. In her pure and clean face, her eyes were the only irregular parts. Malicorne, losing to her pressure gave a small scream and fell on his hips to the ground.

"I realized while you weren’t here. To my hobby, if I don't make fun of you at least once a day, I can't sleep well."

Saito, looking at the ruckus on the balcony next to him, let out a deep sigh. Over there was Malicorne on his hands and feet saying things like” I'm sorry for living” and “This pig is sorry” to a girl with black hair. The girl was screaming through her lungs and making fun of Malicorne.

"Damn it, Guiche and Malicorne, enjoying their peace already."

"Isn't it fine? King Joseph died. Peace is finally achieved. Let them go wild for a little bit."

Next to Saito saying "whatever," was Louise. She tied her hair with a valet and wore a white dress. Seeing her like this still sped up Saito's heart.

"But doesn't Romalia plan to continue the so called 'Holy War'?"

"They can't. They don't have the four void users now that King Joseph has died."

"But, I just have this feeling that they have the confidence to go on without King Joseph."

Saito told Louise about what he was wondering about.

"Think about it. They knew that King Joseph wouldn't help them, and yet they still fought against him knowing full well that he would die. Doesn't that mean they have a way to proceed without him?"

"Think about it..."

Louise replied with a little disappointment.

"Wha?"

"We only knew that King Joseph was a void user right at the end."

"Oh yeah."

Though there were possibilities that King Joseph was the one from Castelmolle(?)'s letter, no one would have predicted that King Joseph was the void user.

When Saito realized right at the end that King Joseph was the void user... He didn't have time to be surprised because of all the murders that had just occurred but...

"Romalia is also the same. They thought that the void user wasn’t King Joseph. They were planning to become allies with them after they defeated that king, but too bad for them. The void user was in fact King Joseph. They killed the void user they needed. Well, they had no choice that time. If they didn't kill him, they'd have been killed. Their speech for the Gallian Army at the end was just them being sore losers."

Saito nodded a little bit. Furthermore, only Saito and Tabitha knew of the letter, so Romalia literally had no way of knowing King Joseph was the void user.

"They say things like 'Elves are our enemy!' and 'They are the ones behind everything!' to start some stupid war, but after everyone saw that huge ball of fire, everybody realized that the elves were WAY out of their league. Moreover, they don't have the four void users now, and apparently you need all four of them to awaken the true void magic. Sucks to be them! That's why they just went right back to Romalia after Tabitha was crowned queen. Since they have nothing to do now, I bet that they’re regretting declaring a war against the elves right now. They acted all tough, but they destroyed the only method to defeat the elves themselves. The pope probably won’t be the pope any longer! Maybe tomorrow, some news about a new pope might come?"

Saito stared at Louise, too bright for his eyes.

"You... are smart."

"You're just stupid. Anyways, we should just accept the peace that we have for a while."

"Yeah..."

Saito replied back with a dark tone.

Louise pointed her finger up, and then said, "Our job after this is to research about the Founder having an elf familiar. I think the reason we have to fight the elves is in there. If we figure out what happened between them, then I think we may be able to stop our conflict with the elves."

Saito nodded.

"Anyways, I just want to be in peace today."

Louise blushed a little, and then leaned towards Saito. Then, Kirche came.

"Oh, was I interrupting you two?"

Seeing Kirche, smiling, Louise quickly replied, "N-no, you aren't interrupting us!"

Kirche was wearing a night dress, opening her chest areas and then leaned on the balcony fence next to Louise and Saito while distributing her sexy aura everywhere.

"Cheers for Tabitha being queen."

She sounded so lonely.

"Kirche, Tabitha didn't give you any contact after that?"

"Ya, well I got a call from her house. They apparently took her mother back to the castle. That's all I know."

Saito blurted out, "Well isn't she anti-social!"

"She's probably busy."

Louise, calming Saito down, gave an excuse.

After that, Tabitha gave him no contact. Although Saito asked to meet Tabitha, he was denied because they were busy. Well, it probably wasn't Tabitha's

decision, but her men's decision... it was still sort of lonely for her and him.

"That's weird though, because Tabitha said she won't be queen."

"She probably has her own way of thinking about things."

"Do you think Romalia said something to her? I'm just worried about that."

As Saito said that, Kirche laughed.

"That's one thing that won't happen to her. Romalia probably think that she’s an easy girl, but she's actually really good at politics. If she has anything to say to us, she'll probably contact us."

"I guess so..."

Saito nodded.

"Why don't you worry about yourself though?"

"Me?"

"Yes, you Saito. Recently, you've become such a fine man."

"R... really?"

"Yeah, not as much as Jean, but you should watch out. You're going to be troubled by girls."

"What do you mean?!"

Louise yelled in fury.

"Oh Louise, you don't have time to lie about your feelings now. If you keep lying, some day another girl will steal him from you!"

Kirche lightly chuckled and left.

"What is she talking about!? That idiot!"

After realizing Saito was spacing out, she kicked Saito.

"Ow!"

"What’s with your face?! Why do you look so happy? Are you wondering about how you'll be ‘troubled’?"

Saito shook his head after Louise glared at him.

"I-I'm not!"

"Lies. You were definitely imagining it! Girls with thi--s big boobs come towards you."

Louise used her both hands to draw a circle around her chest area to show how big 'thi--s' was to Saito.

"You’re gonna go on four legs like this, plunging your face into those huge boobs, and then hug hug hug hug hug hug! That's your imagination!"

Louise went on four legs and pressed her two hands against her face to act out what she had just said.

"Louise... listen."

"Saito is troubled! Troubled by boobs! What! You aren't troubled at all!?"

"What's with your acting..."

"I just acted out what's in your head!"

Louise stood up and screamed at Saito.

"I've never even thought of being troubled by any other girl than you."

"What do you mean? Are you saying that I trouble you too much?"

"I didn't mean it that way..."

"Say it clearly. Who do you want to be troubled by?"

Louise turned her gaze away. Saito immediately realized her 'sign', being so used to Louise.

She's telling Saito to "come romantically".

Louise is just like a newly planted plant. Without the right nutrients, she starts rotting. Well, she gets angry, and it gets troublesome once she gets angry, so Saito must not miss her signs. Saito took a deep breath and complimented Louise.

"I have such a beautiful master next to me. I'd never look away."

Louise growled. She was still worried about what Kirche had just said.

It's true that Saito has become manlier. He probably became like that through all his experiences. He sometimes goes loose, but he is a very responsible vice commander of the Ondine.

Maybe I'm troubled... Louise felt uncertain.

That doesn't mean I'm letting him do what he wants with me. I'm still an aristocrat after all.

The one thing I cannot be is a loose woman.

But look at me right now. I just let Saito do anything with me.

Louise, after imagining the "do anything with me" part became red.

We finally got peace. So I should take my time with those things.

Saito felt awkward after seeing Louise troubled, then blushed and called for Louise, but as he did so...

From the hall came bright music. It had a nice tempo, and it made anything seem enjoyable.

"T-this song..."

Louise said softly. Saito also realized.

"It's the first song we danced to."

After they defeated Fouquet, they danced together. Saito remembered that night

as if it was yesterday.

They somehow held hands and then went back to the hall. They danced to the song. Although Saito's dancing was as bad as it was in the beginning, Louise still felt very happy.

"Oh yeah, your dress and your hair are the same as last time too."

"You finally realized?"

"S-sorry."

"You really are dense."

Although Louise felt slight anger from that, dancing with Saito kept her joyous.

Looking around her, she saw other people dancing. They looked like fitting couples.

Far away, she saw Tiffania. In front of her were many guys requesting a dance. Nobody feared her for being a half elf now. Although Louise and Saito were the only ones that knew that Tiffania is someone that has the blood of the Albion royalty, the male students just couldn't resist her huge bust and her nice personality.

I commend their effort, but none of them is fitting for Tiffania.

Tiffania's beauty is just amazing, even a girl like Louise ends up looking at her and admitting it.

Only some legendary person would actually fit next to Tiffania.

Then what about me?

Louise asked herself.

Do I fit with the hero of Tristain?

Now, Saito's achievements for Tristain are immeasurable. In the war against Gallia, Saito was pretty much fighting solo. Normally, he shouldn't only be a Chevalier, but probably a baron. His achievements aren't inferior to what the

legendary heroes in history had done.

In comparison to that, what am I? Aren't I just pulling Saito behind by not being true to my feelings?

Did I do enough to gain a certificate of a priest?

One part of Louise answered back no. *Even though Saito didn't receive anything...*

Thinking that, her happiness started to fade away.

Am I a match for Saito?

"What's wrong?"

Saito asked Louise, who stopped dancing.

"N-nothing."

"Do you feel hurt somewhere?"

Louise shook her head.

I finally gained peace. I shouldn't worry too much. Saito is next to me anyways.

And... he also said he'll live with me after buying land after graduating.

Worrying might be rude to Saito who's doing that much for me.

"I'm fine, really. Let's continue dancing."

Louise stated this with a clear face. However, the clouds of uncertainty that stuck to her heart wouldn't go away.

The party ended, and the students went back to their dorms. Saito and Louise were also on their way back to their room.

When the two arrived at Louise's room in the third floor,

"... I feel really sick."

Louise leaned on Saito's shoulder as she walked wobbly.

"You drink too much."

This was a very rare occasion: Louise drinking until she loses control. Saito thought that that was wrong of her. *She's not good with alcohol, and yet she of all people had drunk to near death.*

"Heay Sairoo."

"Huh?"

"You sure you will live with me?"

She's only worrying about that? Saito relaxed.

"Yes, I'll live with you. Tomorrow's Void (he's talking about the day of the week) right? Let's go find our mansion tomorrow."

"I'll go."

Louise looked up at Saito as if she was a lost puppy and Saito had come to rescue her, and then nodded multiple times. After that, she stuck closely to Saito.

Seeing Louise like that made Saito feel extremely happy.

"We'll be together forever."

As Saito said that, Louise stared at Saito. Saito just couldn't resist anymore, and ended up hugging and kissing Louise. Louise pushed her lips with great strength onto Saito’s, and no longer got mad when Saito moved his hands towards her thin breast.

"It's small; you don't like it, do you?"

"It's not small."

"Lies. It's small."

Even while saying that, Louise didn’t bother taking Saito's hand off. *Wow, how long did it take for me to get this far?*

Now, the problem is the next step.

Many of the dumb mistakes Saito had done flipped through his head. Every one of those times, it seemed like it was going to work out well, but ended up failing miserably.

This time, I won't fail. Today, I will…

Saito, calming down, started thinking carefully.

How did I fail?

"It's small."

Louise expressed, lacking her usual courage.

Oh yeah, I've gotten into a lot of trouble because of what I say about her breasts.

I must not tell, indirectly or not, that hers are small. I can't say things like "I agree". Absolutely not.

"I don't know about other people's, but I think yours are quite normal."

They aren’t quite normal at all, but...

"Then that's fine."

First gate, cleared.

Next possible routes to failure… definitely Malicorne. However, he's not here, since it's the girls' dorm.

Second gate, cleared.

Now, there must have been something else... I can't remember. Whatever, it'll work out somehow.

So, I should start my engine?

Something unidentifiable exploded inside Saito's head.

"Alright, accelerating. Full throttle, go."

"Accelerating?"

Seems like I said some of it out loud. Louise looked at Saito with a questioning face. Saito shook his head and then looked straight at Louise.

"Just talking to myself."

Should I say it? The devil part of him asked. The rational part tried to stop Saito's inner devil.

No, it won't work out. She'll definitely look at me like I'm a creep.

B-but... that's my dream. If I don't do what I want to do, it's like rebelling against God, who created us to be rational.

A sound of a hammer arose inside his head.

I'll do it.

"Anyways, you're just really cute. I have a request for the very cute you."

Saito's eyes were already looking at his own world. Louise, almost getting sober, resisted. *I've decided to follow him. I won't be surprised whatever he tells me.*

"Say 'Little kitty wants big kitty to bully me'."

"What?"

Louise felt everything falling apart in her head. She simply looked at Saito as if he was a creep.

"Say it, please. No, you have to say it."

Saito had a completely straight face. Louise felt some sort of resistance in her heart. *This is getting too far. What's the little kitty? Is he talking about me? What's this quote really? Hey mother, where is he trying to take me to?*

Even Louise came back to her senses. This was how dumb Saito was.

But... Louise thought hard.

Even though he's like this right now, it was fun dancing with him. I don't know why, but I apparently have to be with this fool of a guy...

"Say it, please say it. Sorry."

"...Will you be nice to me if I say it?"

"Definitely."

"Won't say anything mean?"

"Never."

Louise, having no choice, nodded because she wanted more of Saito's gentle kisses. She wanted him to tell her that she's cute. She bared with it, since she was aware of Saito's mental awkwardness. In the end, Louise was a strong girl.

Then, she said it. Blushing. Shaking.

"Little kitty wants big kitty to bully me."

"THANK YOUUUU!!!"

Saito hugged Louise tightly, unlocked the door, and then opened the door, while hugging Louise.

Along with her maid friends, Siesta, opening her jaws wide open, next to a banner saying "Welcome back Saito" and food, was waiting in Louise's room.

Saito cooled down.

Oh yeah, right now, Siesta's my maid... so she was there the whole time... so she heard what I said...

Her maid friends stayed frozen for a little bit, and then they burst into laughter. Siesta whispered in a voice filled with malicious intent.

"Welcome back, meow."

The other maids start laughing even harder. Louise took a deep breath, and started kicking Saito who was the cause of her embarrassment.

Saito was moaning in agony in his bed from the pain that was even harsher than what he had received in the war against Gallia. The other maids went home, and then Siesta and Louise started an endless verbal battle.

"Miss. Vallière does it too far."

"Huh? What are you talking about? And why do you welcome back Saito, but not me?"

Louise pointed at the banner.

"Well, that's because I'm Saito's personal maid. I have nothing to do with you, Ms. Vallière. Anyways, good to see you home safe."

"I don't feel any emotions in your words!"

Siesta, ignoring Louise started hugging Saito.

"Are you okay? She's such an awful master."

"Sorry! Really, Louise, sorry!"

Saito was talking in his sleep. He was apparently being hit by Louise even in his dreams.

"You did so much in this war, right Saito? I feel proud just as if I were you!"

"Sorry! I'm sorry for living!"

"Don't worry, I, Siesta will always be on your side. In the end, I'm number one, right? I won't get mad if you look at other girls, or even if you kiss them. I'd kill you if you did more than that, but I still love you."

Siesta petted the unconscious Saito's head.

Sort of pisses me off hearing this... but I guess I'll let it go today, since I'm going to live with Saito once I graduate. Goodbye Siesta! Louise felt as if she was the victor of this whole fight for Saito.

"Why are you smiling?"

Siesta, who realized Louise was acting weird, stared at her. Louise crossed her leg on her chair, and said slowly, "Noooothing~".

"Please tell me."

"Fine. It’s kinda the ‘You can do whatever you want with Saito for today’ thing."

"What do you mean?"

Siesta moved towards Louise.

"I mean, I'm going to live with Saito after we graduate. I mean, why don't you have fun with him while it lasts? I'll allow some of it."

"What are you saying..."

Siesta made a face.

"Huh?"

"If Saito moves, then I'm obviously coming with him."

"I don't need any maids. We are going to buy a small place to live."

"Miss. Vallière is not the one to decide."

"What?"

"You know already. I was assigned to be Saito's maid by her Majesty. So, if you dismiss me or fire me, it's as if you’re telling her Majesty that you’re rebelling."

Louise shook. It's true, Louise alone couldn't dismiss Siesta.

Siesta, feeling victorious, told Louise.

"Well anyways, if you’re looking for a mansion, I'll come with you guys, since it'll be my new workplace!"

Chapter 2 - Searching for a Residence

At the countryside Tristania of the Kingdom of Tristain....., a corner past the Rosroll Forest.

Wales was an estate agent running a business in Tristania, his customers all either rich entrepreneurs or nobles. Today, he was scratching his head in frustration. Though he dealt with nobles, the estates he handles were not "territories" and had nothing to do with titles. They were mere "lands" any rich merchant and aristocrat could purchase, which very much explains why when today's customers appeared, he was overjoyed. However one looked at it, these customers must be one of the top nobles of this country.

If someone as famed as them became his customers, sooner or later his shop would also rise to fame accordingly.

If he was able to make a successful deal, this customer may very likely introduce other new customers. Imagining how big his business could become, Wales actively searched for all sorts of estates.

But, this master and servant.....

"This isn't my cup of tea" Both hands crossed in front of her chest, criticizing Wales's estates, was the third child of the Valliere family, Louise Valliere.

This morning, around 8 a.m. they came to Wales's office. Without much ado, they had asked "Introduce us to a house," describing how their future home should be made for two, how it wouldn't matter even if it were smaller. It looked like it was a pair of young lovers trying to avoid the eyes of the world, preparing a temporary residence before their marriage.

Couples seeking refuge because of their difference in statuses like them were common. According to their situation, Wales quickly picked out a few estates for them.

But, it seemed like their dream house had still yet to show up. The third lady of the duke's family, this pinked-haired beauty could not stop her grumbles against any of Wales's suggestions.

"What's wrong with it? Tell me." Asked the frowning servant of Miss Valliere, a black haired teen. Just by the looks of his clothing, it was obvious that he was not any teen. From the silver coat of arms of a Chevalier, he must be the legendary knight of a civilian's background - co-captain Hiraga Saito.

Because of his civilian background, he was by far a much easier customer to communicate with. So far, he had shown much interest in most of the houses suggested by Wales.

"This place isn't so bad, is it?"

In contrast, every time he'd say so, Miss Valliere's eyebrows would spring into action. Using either the color of the exterior wall, or the worn out structure, how the room faces a bad direction, even going about how the trees planted in the gardens aren't good enough and so on so on, she found all sorts of reasons to send him off.

Wales was also a person with his own dignity. As he took them to the last house possible, it seemed quite unreasonable that they would even complain about this one. Well, Wales was definitely in for a surprise "Young m'lady, what don't you like about this one? The one who designed this house was a famous architect, Sir Rosa Venturini. Under the invitation of an artistic noble, he designed every single inch of this building!"

It was true that this house was filled with an artistic atmosphere, compared to the other buildings they have seen so far, this one certainly looked very outstanding.

Piled into a hemispherical shell with stones, at the center were a grand staircase and a courtyard. In the courtyard grew an enormous tree, running through the entire house.

Its walls were decorated with flowerbeds, planted with all sorts of flowers. The entire house seemed to be cut out from part of the forest itself.

"Incredible, how should I say it, it feels like it is merged with the nature itself. This sure is incredible" Saito praised while nodding. Wales nodded affirmatively

towards Saito's words.

"Isn't it? As expected of the Highness's knight, you see things differently! For this one, you only need 10,000 Ecu, it's the absolute exception out of all exceptions! Houses better than this one, you won't be able to find any throughout the entire Kingdom of Tristain!"

He's got a point, Saito thought, trying to urge Louise "Take a look, no matter from which angle this looks very nice, doesn't it?"

"You're annoying, I ask you, how is this good? Which part of it looks good. This entire building is a vase"

"That’s what makes it interesting"

With a displeased look, Louise sighed. "Are you dumb? Choosing a home just because of this reason alone, it's no wonder you have such bad taste!"

"What?"

Seeing them fight, the black haired girl behind them suggested "Well well, calm down both of you! Since we're here to search for a good home.... let's not fight, OK?"

"How annoying, how does this have anything to do with you anyway?"

"Of course it does, as I'm the caretaker, it's my duty to help you choose carefully right now" Countered the black haired girl with a calm expression. Seeing this incident, Wales began to worry.

From the looks of it..... the only reason this pinked-haired aristocrat was unhappy was because of the black-haired girl. The more she praised the house, the worse Miss Valliere's expressions would look, eventually complaining here and there, such as how the color of the wall looks bad. If the teen knight comforts, her mood would take another turn for the worse. Seeing how the pattern had cycled many times, Wales was becoming very frustrated over this.

"Saito! Come and look! This kitchen, is so big, hurray~~~~!" she screamed happily. Saito and Siesta began wandering around the house for more.

Behind them, Louise kept a gloomy expression for the whole time. "......although I said I didn't need maids"

Just like last night, Siesta followed them in broad daylight. If Louise complained to Saito, he would then say "where could you find a better helper than Siesta?"

Certainly, on closer inspection one would realize it was almost impossible to find a maid quicker and more efficient than Siesta for housework. Moreover, the idea of not hiring a maid at all was incomplete to begin with. There were jobs that could not be handed to a male after all.

Rather than hiring an unknown maid, Siesta was certainly a better choice.

On the other hand..... these things could not be decided with reason. The bright colored future Louise had originally imagined began to turn grey.

"Incredible, I never knew a stove could be so big! This way we can cook anything~~~~! Would you like to make your order, Mister Saito?"

"Well..... as long as it's made by Siesta, any food would taste great"

Louise gritted her teeth to the degree where she could rip her handkerchief into shreds. What was this! This was like a conversation between a newlywed couples! Who exactly did he want to live with~~~~?!

Feeling as if she lost very badly, Louise began to fight. After searching around herself, Louise discovered an excellent item.

"Hey--, ahem, ahem ahem"

"Hmm? What's wrong?" Saito noticed this side. Keeping as calm an expression as possible, Louise pointed to a corner of the ceiling.

"This is an excellent chandelier don't you think, as expected of something built by an artistic noble, an avant-garde design, but you can feel its elegance through its simplicity" Louise nodded with a straight face.

".....but that's only a basket used to dry vegetables" Siesta chuckled, making Louise go red all the way to her neck.

"Please Louise, don't joke around, even I can see that it's only a basket"

"Ha, if the job was given to Miss Valliere, I'm sure we'll never be able to choose a suitable house"

"Nobles don't have much common sense, it can't be helped"

Finding it hard to swallow, Louise swung open a trapdoor on the floor "L-look, there's a basement"

"A storage room, I guess?"

"Possible. Say, Saito, shall we take a look around?"

"Nah," Saito swiftly rejected, soon turning back to Siesta's presentations. With the choice completely in the other's hands, Louise was out of ideas and snuck into that storage room, sitting down and hugging her knees.

"Look, Mister Saito! This is the ultimate oven! It's the newest product! Look how much effort they spent even on the vents!"

"Although I don't really get it, if Siesta says so then it must be very incredible!"

Hmm--hmm--hmm--hmm. Louise hummed a song alone, but no one heard it. Suddenly in front of her eyes, something popped out.

"F-frog--!" Louise who had always had a genuine dislike for frogs panicked, unconsciously casting spells. The house was quickly filled with surprised cries and smoke....

After the smoke have finally cleared, Wales told them "My deep apologies, but it would be impossible for me to suggest a house that is able to satisfy Miss Valliere"

"Then, in the end you didn't find a single thing?" The shopkeeper Scarron sighed. After Wales had completely given up, to clear up their gloomy emotions, Louise and the rest came to Tristainia's "Charming Fairies" inn.

"That's what happened, all because of her, saying only selfish things. In addition, even magic was used. Just the repair bill alone was 200 Ecu," Saito complained grumpily.

Louise hung her head in shame "I-it's not completely my fault either"

"And? Exactly what kind of house will you be pleased with?" Saito asked exhaustedly from the bottom of his heart.

Actually, all she wants is for the maid to be gone, but directly saying so would mean admitting her own defeat.

With no choice, Louise began listing one by one, saying how the position of each room should be like, where the sunlight should reach, so on so on.

Standing next to Scarron, Jessica nodded from watching Louise. "In short, Louise feels uncomfortable living with Siesta, right?"

Instantly the atmosphere froze. Well, that was to be expected. Realizing so, Saito couldn't help but turn pale. It felt as if the thing he feels most guilty about has been placed under the spotlight.

On the other hand....., he had always felt that Louise and Siesta had an understanding on this. After all, the one he likes is Louise. Plus, even after clarifying it with Siesta, Siesta was still willing to be a maid..... Siesta completely sees his charming points, the way she feels for him has already

surpassed love.....

Just by looking at Louise and Siesta, in addition to the embarrassing atmosphere, one can feel the cold chilly air hanging between them.

"Recently your relationship with each other seemed to have improved" Saito mumbled casually. Scarron patted Saito's shoulders and said "Saito-kun really doesn't understand the heart of a woman~~~~ well, this has been the way it was from the start"

"Eh? Eh? Eh eh?"

Scarron continued, wiggling his waist "After purchasing a house, that's when your real life begins, isn't it? Cute little Louise wants to settle down, but so does cute little Siesta"

Saito noticed how both Louise and Siesta have been staring at him for some time.

Wincing their eyes, they seemed to be appealing on something.

What do you plan to do? Questioned their looks.

Which would be the best way out of this...?

Only recently had Saito begun to sense Louise being attracted to himself, explained perfectly why he had no desire to consider the feelings of girls other than Louise. Of course, every now and then his body acted on its own accord.....

As for Siesta, he liked her a lot too. But this kind of fondness was completely different from the one he felt for Louise. Yet even so, Siesta never complained. Just considering the things she had done for him, he could not thank her enough.

If she said she wanted to become Saito's maid, Saito would not be able to refuse, no matter what. If he did, it would feel as if he had forsaken an important thing that defines him as a human.

All sorts of thoughts tangled in Saito's mind, refusing to let Saito reach any conclusion.

Looking at the three of them like this, Scarron clapped his hands "If that's so, then let's solve it using the adult's way"

"The adult's way?"

"Mhm. If this goes on, we'll never produce any result"

The three of them blushed in embarrassment.

"I would suggest Saito-kun buy a house all by himself, live with cute little Louise, hire little Siesta, then all's solved"

Siesta's face glowed brightly; Louise's eyes shot daggers; Saito face palmed.

"Why does it always end up like that!" Louise yelled. Scarron answered Louise coldly "Say, little Louise. Saito-kun is a national hero right now"

Louise had also noticed this. Even right then, outside the shop was a band of people fighting to get a glimpse of the "heroic charisma"..... even earlier on their way to town, they were often stared at in the same way by other pedestrians.

And all of those looks were aimed towards.....

From the visiting crowd, a middle-aged female jumped forward and knelt in front of Saito.

"Eh? What! What's going on!" Saito flustered.

"Excuse me....., you must be the co-captain of her majesty's Water Spirit Ondine Knights, Sir Hiraha...."

"Erm, it's Hiraga....." Hearing Saito's response, the visiting crowd boiled. Enthusiastically. Feeling a natural sense of fear towards this disturbance, Louise and the others shuddered.

"Being able to meet you in person, I'm so, so touched~! Although commoner, you made so many great achievements! You are our pride! Please, you must must must name this child!"

Behind this hysterical female, an apparent businessman also jumped forward and

forcefully shook Saito's hand. The crowd began to list Saito's achievements.

"The retreat of Albion"

"His active performance at the Tiger's Highway!"

"And then he defeated hundreds at the Lelion river! After hearing fantastic stories about you, we Tristania citizens could not be more proud!"

"Well, it was only around ten....."

"It's already difficult enough! Defeating ten nobles! But now you're a noble yourself!"

Looked like other than Saito's activities, various pointless chatter was also included. Now that Louise thought of it, if he was well known throughout the Gallian nobles, it wouldn't be so surprising if Saito's heroic stories were spread around Tristainia.

Before this, Saito's name had already been well-known from his performance at Albion. The war with Gallia could only make him even more famous.

Saito shook his head, too embarrassed to know what else to do. The treatment he already got at the Magic Academy had evolved to a city-wide phenomenon, no, perhaps even a country-wide phenomenon.

With a low voice, Scarron whispered to the Louise who was pushed away by the crowd.

"Little Louise, do you understand now? Saito's popularity is now sky high in Tristania, he will barely be able to walk alone on the streets"

"How, how did he suddenly turn so popular....."

Ahem, Scarron coughed, pointing towards the poster on the walls of the inn. It was the advertisement of the Tarbes **Garbo's** Troupe. Louise examined the repertoire with round eyes.

"......Albion's swordsman?"

On the poster was a picture of a man holding a sword, facing a bunch of scary looking Albion soldiers. The man was dressed in leather, handsome looking and tall. He looked like somebody somewhere, but not so much in other places.

But, this..... unless.....

"Since we have a chance, why don't we all go and have a look?"

Louise nodded with cold sweat on her forehead.

"Cruel ruthless Albion army! Come at me!"

Watching the opera on the stage, Saito and the others were wordless.

The black haired actor with a sword was facing a dummy dragon and actors dressed up as nobles.

"There are 70,000 enemies! I am alone! But God and Founder Brimir will never abandon Tristain!"

Saito muttered quietly "There're only 7 of them"

"How do you suppose they put so many people on stage" Scarron calmly replied.

"To save our kingdom, our dearest Queen sent me here! Swordsman of the wind, Hiraha Saigo!"

"Swordsman of the wind"

"His title changed!"

The actor portraying Saito waved the sword in his hand, using it to block the attacks of the dummy dragon and the enemy actors, then defeating them one by one.

For each enemy defeated, the audience burst into wild cheers. On closer inspection, most of the audience were commoners.

During this process, a basket carrying the diva slowly descended from above,

singing the song of praise about the swordsman

"Hero of Tristain~~~~~~~

My hero~~~~~~"

Accompanying the song, was the fight one would expect to see in talent shows.

"Such overly swordsmen drama....." Saito expressed his thoughts in sorrow.

"Although this play has been under heavy criticism from critics, it is very popular in the hearts of us citizens"

Even this kind of lame story content could not stop the wild cheers from the audience.

Everyone was chanting "Swordsmen Hiraha" in unison.

Saito buried his face deep into his scarf. Without his sword and with his black hair hidden, no one would recognize that this was the real Saito.

Siesta looked at the play, then looked at Saito, her face full of admiration.

"There's Mister Saito! Look, look look. Ohh..... my Saito, finally appeared on stage!"

"That's not me.... it's someone else...."

"Waa, that's soo cool! That's what you looked like when you defeated the Albion army....."

Siesta took no notice of Saito's words, deeply mesmerized in the play.

On the stage, swordsman Hiraha finally defeated the enemy captain. Seeing this, the heated audience all stood up, whooping.

"Bravo--! Swordsman Hiraha! Bravo--!" echoed throughout the theatre. Usually, stories about achievements of a swordsman wouldn't be allowed to be on a stage as large as this, only performed on small puppet theaters or plays on the streets. Most likely, this only passed the test since this swordsman "Hiraha" is based on a national hero.

Overwhelmed by the audience's enthusiasm, Louise muttered simply "In-incredible....."

It was as if he was as popular as the Pope himself. In fact, in the eyes of a peasant, Saito's fame preceded even the king himself.

"Hey, take a look on that side" Scarron pointed to a corner of the audience. There, a large number of females stood blushing. Their excited voices could be heard all the way to Louise and the others.

"Incredible...., a mere swordsman being able to take down the enemy captain. Too bad it's only a story."

"What are you talking about! The hero for this story actually exists. Thanks to him, the army of Tristain was saved."

"I even heard that he received a medal this time in Gallia."

Really wanting to be with that kind of person, the girls all nodded dreamily.

Louise shivered. No..... she unconsciously acknowledges Saito's achievements at Albion and Gallia. Only after seeing it happen in person does she realize how she had ignored these things.

"Do you understand now? Whether or not you hire a maid, nothing will change. Nowadays, the number of ladies who have their eyes on Saito are as uncountable as flies around a pie. He did, after all, make all of these things happen, he even became the co-captain of a squadron." Afterwards, Scarron tuned down to a low voice "Not only so."

"Eh?"

"Look over there."

Right where Scarron indicated with his head, was the balcony seats on the second floor reserved usually for grand nobles enjoying operas.

From the gaps of the curtains, one could see how unpleasant the noble's face looked. As a noble, watching how a knight of a commoner's background defeated a noble, even if enemy, must be painfully boring.

Louise couldn't help but laugh.

"I know, right? Do you understand? Popularity also brings unhappy people like them. Randomly hiring an unknown person, who knows what will be mixed into your food. That's how the brother of the Gallian king died, in case you forgot. That Earl Oscar died from poisoned bread. For someone like Saito, a trusty maid like little Siesta is definitely needed. What you need is a true friend who can report to you any suspicious activities from the people you've hired."

Louise finally understood the reason why Scarron insisted they hire Siesta.

True. As admirers increase, so do enemies. From now on, Saito and Louise couldn't let their guard down while defending themselves against these enemies.

"Shopkeeper Scarron is right"

Drawing death just because of some stupid jealousy would be a hell of a way to die. Thinking so while watching the Siesta crying out hysterically along with the rest of the crowd, Louise suddenly felt how important this ally is. If it's her, no matter under whatever circumstances, she would never betray Saito.

While Louise kept adjusting her thoughts, she could almost read Saito's thoughts on this play modeled after him.

Wow, I'm slowly becoming famous.... I wonder what would my family and friends on Earth would say if they saw this?

Surprised, or happy....?

After the opera ended, with his head completely covered in his scarf, Saito hurried out of the theater. Louise and the others surrounded Saito, cautiously watching their surroundings. Just like how celebrities are treated, from the situation Saito is in currently, it was as if he was a star back on Earth.

Around them, civilians who have just finished the opera could not hold back their enthusiasm, still chattering about the opera.

Hurriedly leaving this place, arriving on the streets.....

"Oh my! If it isn't Louise!" A familiar voice called out. Turning their heads

around, they instantly recognized Guiche in his brand new Chevalier cape. Beside him were the rest of the Water Spirit Ondine knights.

Best not to make a fuss around here. Just as she was about to push Saito and leave this dangerous area, Guiche closed the distance between them, smiling "Hey hey! Where are you going! There's something I want to ask! Where did Saito go? That guy, I haven't spotted him since this morning!"

Pushing his glasses up his nose, Reynard whispered "Louise, tell us if you know. We must hurry. But don't get shocked! We found a pretty amazing castle!"

Hearing that name, it began to draw some of the people's attentions. Bad! Although in the show they used some weird name Hiraha Saigo, or was it Hirama? Anyhow, it still sounds similar to Saito.

Saito pulled his scarf even tighter, covering almost his entire face. Meanwhile, Louise began to shoo them away "D-don't know, I don't know that kind of guy...."

"What are you talking about? Don't tell me you lost your memory again? Lemme remind you? You know, the retreat from Albion? The man who replaced someone to stop the army?"

"Sh-shut up!"

More and more citizens began to gather. Unfortunately, Guiche was the kind of teen whose excitement grows with the size of his audience. A 100% match. Still not knowing how widespread Saito's legends already were, he began his speech, waving his hands exaggeratedly "Not only that! He single-handedly fought on the Lelion river! The first to come forth was the so-called undefeatable **Duke Socarton**! But Saito couldn't care less! Easily chasing Duke **Socarton** all over the place, beautifully slicing his staff in two!"

The crowd began to heat up. Mistakenly believing that their reaction was because of his charisma, he puffed up his voice "The second opponent had good skills! But we, as the Water Spirit Ondine Knights..... wah, ah!"

Louise sprang towards Guiche, clamping his mouth shut. "You, enough"

"Huh? What's wrong! How's it bad to talk about that guy's achievements!"

That's right that's right, the crowd booed. Just as Siesta, Scarron and Jessica were about to bring Saito away from these dangerous grounds..... an amazingly sharp-sighted Malicorne found the hidden Saito.

"Oh heey! You were here all along Saito! Why hide your face? Such a weird fellow!" Then he ran to Saito, unwrapping his carefully concealed face. The gathered crowd turned wild like a thunderstorm.

"Th-this gentleman, is the co-captain of the Water Spirit Ondine Knights, Hiraha Saigo?"

"Right you are," Malicorne nodded. The people crammed towards Saito like a flash flood. The disturbance caused in the "Charming Fairies'" Inn was incomparable to this one.

"Pl-please bless us!"

"Please touch my hand!"

"What's going on?" asked Guiche, still completely clueless about Saito being popular to the degree where they have made him into an opera. Saito was engulfed by the incoming wave of civilians.

"Oi! Where, where are you touching! Stop!"

Somewhat surprised, the Water Spirit Ondine Knights also joined in the crowd amusingly. "Wahahahaa! Popularity ahoy! Say, Saito, you haven't used the ransom you saved yet, right? Stop looking for tiny little dollhouses, let's get a castle! We found a pretty good one! A piece of land as large as 60 **Allubon**, it's an ancient castle with quite some history! They even claim there're ghosts or something, but those things are nothing in front of our bravery!"

"Don't want those kinds of castles! Besides, I already split the money with you guys!"

"It's only 2,000 ecus! Tell you what, take your wallet out!"

"Wait.... I earned that.....oof! Waah!"

Trapped in between the castle-hungry Water Spirit Knights and the "Hiraha"

chanting crowd, Saito's situation became too difficult for anyone to save. Things the way they were, no one would be able to stop it. It was like being dragged into a tsunami.

Louise watched this scene, shocked; Siesta watched with fascination; Jessica and Scarron stood by chuckling to themselves.

"Hey! What's with the disturbance! Disband yourselves at once!" Cried out a team of cavalry from the other end of the street.

"Or what! You should back off!"

"Say what?" The leading female knight drew her sword. "We are her highness' Musketeer Corps! Disobey and I'll have you all arrested!"

Just the mention of her highness' personal Musketeer corps was enough to quiet even a crying baby.

Even though their members were made up entirely of young females, none of them felt that they should be looked down upon. Due to their ferocity, they became widely known almost instantly.

"Good! Take them all to the **Shelbourne** jail!"

Hearing the word **Shelbourne** plus Agnes's thunderous bellow, the citizens scattered without a trace.

Seeing Saito kneeling on the ground coughing, Agnes said "Oh, it's you guys. Perfect."

"Thanks for helping..... eh? Perfect?"

Agnes dismounted her horse and handed Saito a scroll.

"Perfect so that I can hand this to you. So you were at Tristania. Sure saves my time"

"What's this?"

Saito gulped. On it was the seal of the royal family of Tristain.

"Her majesty requests me. Immediately, at the palace."

Chapter 3 - Henrietta's Melancholy, Louise's Anxiety, Saito's Promotion

Henrietta was sitting at her desk in deep thoughts. She wanted to forget everything that happened back in Gallia, but could not let go. The Vittorio who gains everyone's trust, his true nature, and his betrayal..... no, not betrayal, but Henrietta's own misconception about him.

Then, there's the Gallian King who turns out to be a void user. That darkness was as if a well with no bottom, his pure black heartedness..... Joseph's despair, even for just a tiny little touch, would..... Henrietta's heart almost broke into dust..... Magic combined of profound void and elven primal, its power was far more incredible than imagined..... Being able to completely survive without a scratch, now that she thinks of it, it's a miracle.

But now he's dead. Which in other words, means that one void user is missing, simultaneously crushing the ambitions of Vittorio. His grand scheme of claiming the holy lands back.....

"Headache..... fighting with elves, must have gone mad." Henrietta mumbled under her voice.

Everytime she remembered the giant fireball she saw on that ship, Henrietta would shiver all over. The crystal made from elves' primal magic..... and Vittorio was planning to fight with people who can produce that kind of horrifying magic!

Since the void user is already gone, surely Vittorio would give up on his "crusade" as well.

".....The king is dead, the Pope's ambitions crushed." Only after did these broken sentences seep out of her mouth did she finally feel some comfort in both body and mind. Like trying to get drunk, she used that peacefulness to blind her

consciousness. Once again, Henrietta began considering the post-war issues of Tristain. If it were not for these tasks, she would eventually become a prisoner of that heavy cloud of despair..... or so she feels.

What comes next would be.....

First she must hold a meeting with the new Queen Charlotte as soon as possible. Henrietta still remembers how not long ago Queen Charlotte was still a student of the Magic Academy.

Why did someone as logical as her suddenly agree to take the throne?

Romalia's eyes and ears were all over Carcassonne back then, so only formal congratulations have been given to the new power. Charlotte's real intentions must be known as soon as possible.

A puppet under Romalia control? Or....., is there any other conspiracy?

Henrietta wants to understand Queen Charlotte's unreserved, honest thoughts. To do so, she must first be frank and open with Henrietta. These things.... just by Henrietta's own power are impossible to achieve.

There needs to be a person to act as a bridge between them.

Henrietta was already clear that she had the perfect candidate for this diplomat. Everytime she remembers of him, there would always be mixed emotions. Not long ago in Gallia, he saved her yet again.

On that ship, he was the one who stopped Joseph from casting the spell. Henrietta bit on her lips.

"It's hard to be unmoved if he saves me every time from the most undesirable situations just like that."

But is he not Louise's lover already?

"Thoughts like these could not be more desecrated....."

Not only so, she made a promise with him that from then own, she would only display her empress's side.....

But.... as soon as the war ended, as long as some sort of peacefulness exists inside her, these burning emotions will most definitely revive. The small hotel in Tristainia, under the shade of the curtains in the Magic Academy, the kisses which happened on those days still burns her lips.....

In the midst of all urgent matters, only these thoughts managed to keep Henrietta herself. Why? Henrietta asked herself.

Most likely because.... she never firmly executed what she promised, so Henrietta thought. Not because they did not already consider their own feelings, her own status as Queen, and their relationship as friends, but because it is impossible to extinguish the burning flames that lights up from the ashes.

Given enough time, those warm memories will definitely be recalled again. If, by then, there is no room for me in his heart..... then I will give up. Forget all which happened.

But, will I?

The image of their kiss surfaced. Henrietta smiled, the smile of a delicate and beautiful woman. That smile gave off an irresistible enchantment. Mixed with her gracefulness and glamor, it could bewitch every man in the world.

"Back then he was head over heels for me." After saying so, Henrietta blushed. She then urgently surveyed her surroundings. It would be bad if the expression she made just now was seen by someone else.

In addition, she now feels an overwhelming sense of shame towards her imagination. As a Queen herself and him being the co-captain of her knights, if such a rumor was spread, the effects would be disastrous. Scandals are hard to dispel.

On top of this, he is her best friend's lover.....

Henrietta clutched her chest and muttered, as if trying to resist trembling. "Turns out I am no different from gossiping women on the streets or ladies in the palace....."

At this moment, someone knocked on her door. It was different from the way Agnes would usually knock. Henrietta flashed a slightly surprised look, then

quickly responded with a "Please come in."

The door opened and in came Queen Mother Marion and Prime Minister Mazarin. A rare sight for both of them to be visiting together.

"If there are things you need, I could have came to you immediately," Henrietta said. The old but ever so beautiful Marion shook her head. Despite the fact that she was already in her forties, her appearance was just as dazzling as ten years ago. Her appearance had changed little since then.

"It's nothing of importance. You are the Queen right now, it is of my duty to come to you for these matters."

"Matters?"

How rare of Queen Mother to come see her for help. Marion looked at Mazarin standing still like a servant. After seeing him nod, Marion first kissed her daughter's forehead. "You seem to be thinner these days. Have you eaten well?"

"Yes, Mother. I eat some fruits at night. It helps keep me awake."

"Then you're overworking yourself. You are too diligent. I suppose you turned like this because you want to manage everything personally."

What is Mother planning to do? In which manner should she respond? Just as she was pondering like so, Marion suddenly revealed her true intentions. "Get married, Henrietta."

"Eh?" A response of surprise.

Marriage? Me?

The more doubt she showed on her face, the more firm Marion became. "You have to choose a suitable husband."

"But...."

This time, Mazarin spoke "The Queen Mother is correct, your majesty."

"Getting married..... first of all, am I not Queen?"

"Mhmm, which means he would become King. Of course, he would need to have a suiting title beforehand..... Listen, Henrietta. You act too extreme sometimes. You're young, you sometimes lose control. This is what I am worried about. Are you not afraid of causing danger to yourself?"

Henrietta assumes she is referring to how she headed to Gallia alone some time ago. With a bit of strong emotions, she replied "But, that's why I only brought one knight to accompany me to Gallia. Even if something went wrong, the only casualties would be us."

"What I am worried about not only includes you. What do you think a country without its king would be like? A never ending battle..... a civil war! I do not want Tristain to become just like Gallia, brother taking the throne then niece takes it back.... If even family could become like this, between power wielding nobles, I can daresay it will turn out even worse."

Henrietta remained silent. Her mother was considering what would happen if one day she is gone.

"Not only as a mother I am worried about your own safety, but as Queen Mother, Queen Mother of Tristain, I have to warn you. In case anything happens, give birth to a heir. This is what you have to do as the leader of the kingdom."

"From now on, I will definitely take good care of myself." Henrietta replied with an attitude implying "please take this matter back". Marion sighed.

"Prime Minister of the State, this would be difficult for me to say, could you convey it for me?"

"There is another objective to your majesty's marriage."

Henrietta's expression turned into slight confusion. Objective..... what originally should be a pair of lovers getting together, why would the word "objective" be here?

Regardless, she did not ridicule Mazarin's strange choice of words. Henrietta was not a child anymore. She realized that her marriage had no purpose other than achieving political gains.

"Please continue."

"Then, forgive me for being so direct..... please do not get angry at this! Your majesty's policy has induced a certain amount of dissent within some of your subjects."

"And 'some' points to?"

"This I do not have information on. My informant kept his mouth very shut, naturally this implies he could hear very far, one may believe. I could not agree more so."

Henrietta sighed. "So? Why do I have to get married?"

Marion could sense the irritation in her tone, therefore spoke with a disciplining voice "You have done a lot of unprecedented things already, not only did you venture into enemy territory, but also...."

Mazarin walked behind Marion. "Very often use a team of knights with peasants."

Henrietta's face turned faintly hotter. "If there were more people who could trust me, things wouldn't have turned out like this. Besides, do you know how much they have done for the country?"

As if instructing a naughty little child, Marion continued "This is not about the amount of contribution. Those so called 'old' left-winged nobles, compared to anything else, value tradition far more. This is the thing that's supporting their beliefs."

"Then I shall be the one to break the flawed tradition."

Mazarin coughed, then turned back towards Henrietta. "Exactly that attitude of your highness, has caused a considerable amount of unrest within the nobles."

"Then bring those people here in front of me. I shall personally ask them, during the battles of Albion and Gallia, what have they done!"

Marion strengthened her voice "You wish for your throne to become unstable just like Gallia?"

"That is not of my intention. I.... I just want everything to be fair."

"If, you really think that way, we should first start turning enemies into friends."

"Enemies? Enemies you say? Of whom are these 'enemies' refering to?"

"Enemies not only include those on the battlefields. In the court, there are enemies who will approach you smiling. Your highness should be already well aware of this. I dearly hope your highness will listen, for I only make opinions which help nurture your highness's growth. Very regretfully, there are too few loyal companions that may be trusted. Exactly since the war has ended, you must therefore recruit more allies. Especially the 'old' nobles who have been supporting the country to date. It is of much importance to bring them to your side. In politics, their assistance is indispensable."

Being cornered by the both of them, Henrietta hurried Prime Minister Mazarin with an attitude crying "amuse me". "....I understand. Since our topic is already here, do let tell me of your plans. Who should I be married to?"

"There are a few candidates." With a "slam", Mazarin piled a stack of documents onto the desk. Henrietta randomly chose some and began flipping the pages, her expressions growing darker as the number of pages flipped increased.

"Earl Ariel, Sire Ladomar..... even Earl Harold. These people, aren't they all useless crap!?"

The family backgrounds of these people just named were perfect and had no flaws, but none of them can be deemed as useful.

"Useless, exactly. If they had more ambition who knows what they will plan to do." Mazarin said as if introducing the coup de grace.

To suppress the unrest between the nobles and getting married to one of them..... What Queen mother and the Prime Minister wanted was, in other words this exactly. The two of them are right in a sense.

"Other than this, there is..... about your highness's special grant towards co-captain's rise in title."

Henrietta was suddenly reminded of her weakness and hesitated. "Cough, cough cough..... Is there an issue? Considering the number of things he has done in Gallia, a reward of that amount is by all means necessary."

"Bearing the insignia of a duke on his shoulders, seems to be a rather heavy burden." Mazarin commented as if sighing, fidgeting with his mustache.

"What are you talking about? Considering the amount of things he has done for our country, it is the bare minimum that he should be....."

"You are mistaken, Henrietta. The Prime Minister is merely worried about his safety. Granting a peasant the title of duke in such a short period of time, how much jealousy do you think he would be subjected to? Like what this wise man said just now, there are enemies in the court who approach you stealthily."

The sudden realization was a blow to Henrietta "That's..."

"Whatever you do, remember not to over do it, do you understand? And, don't forget about that as well." Only saying so much, Marion watched Mazarin take his leave. Henrietta also took a bow and kissed the back of Queen mother's hand.

"You are doing very well. Just, don't you forget, always be wary of your surroundings. The tasks of a King, all ends up in distributing and organizing, nothing more, nothing less. If things aren't done carefully, you will only cause disputes everywhere."

By the time Saito and the others arrived at the Palace it was already 7 o'clock at night. With Agnes leading the way, Louise and Saito headed directly to Henrietta's office.

On the other side of the door Henrietta seemed rather anxious. Every muscle of her tired, she sprawled over the chair. Despite so, as soon as she caught a glimpse of Saito and the others, her expressions immediately brightened, as if finally finding someone she can be true to.

"Welcome to my office. Come, take a seat. Although to welcome a national hero, this certainly does seem a little simple...."

Saito looked around. Certainly, Henrietta's office was close to being empty. Except for desks and chairs, the rest are only bookshelves and candles, nothing

more. Ever since all the furniture had been sold, it seems that there has been no changes made. Calling over servants, Henrietta instructed to bring forth red wine and delicacies prepared beforehand. "I am really sorry, unlike the welcoming of the new Queen that Gallia had, this is hardly a comparison..... Right now we are really lacking money in the treasury. When I suggested having a small party in the courtyard, the finance minister was already pulling his hair out."

"We, we could not be more honored!" Louise exclaimed hurriedly. Saito also said exhaustedly, "Something as simple as this is perfect. I've already had enough of the crowd."

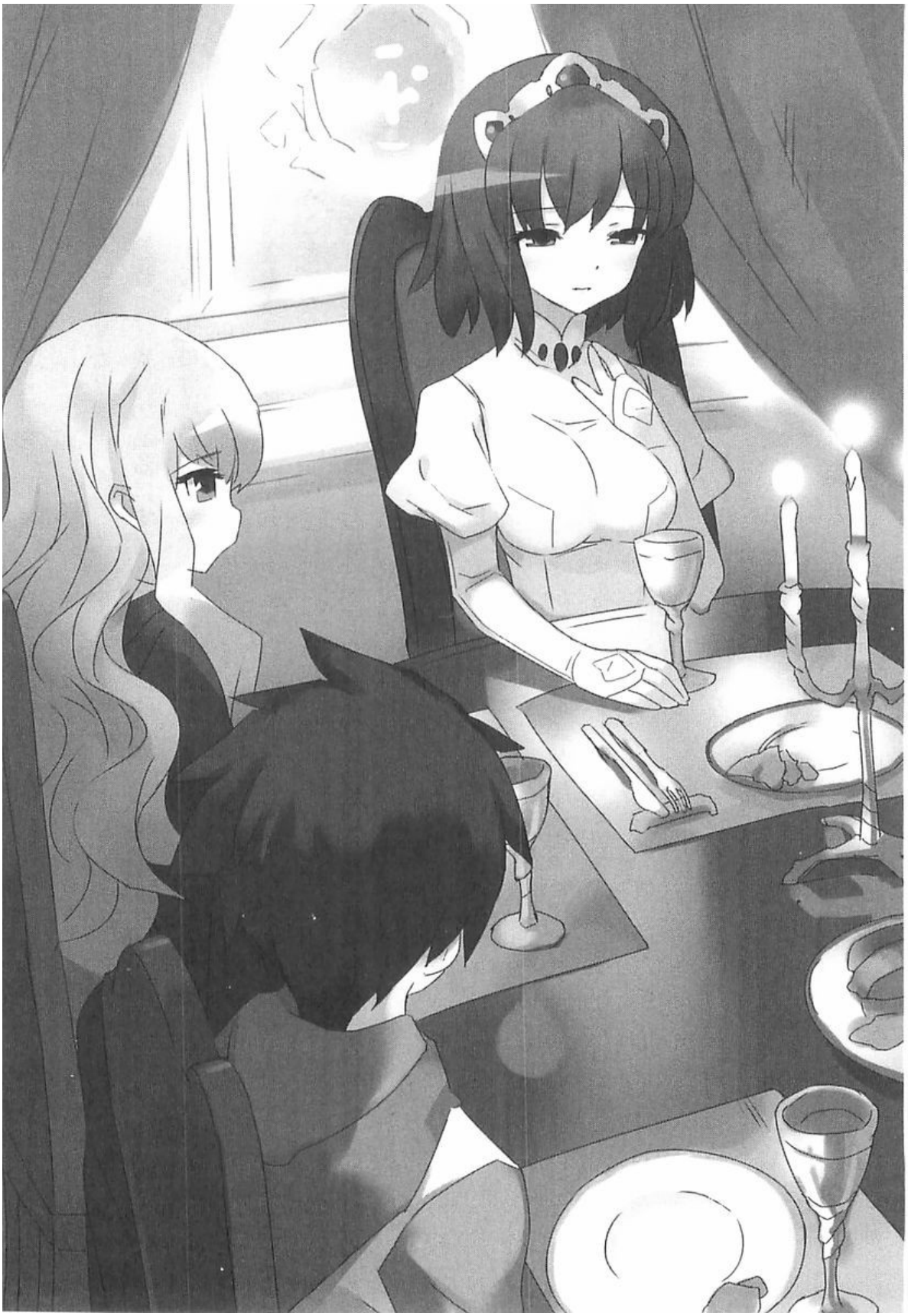
"Oh? Why is that?" After inquiring such, Agnes reported a rather fascinating and weird event about the disorder they've just had.

"Ho! You are saying there is now even a drama about Saito? Seems like you have become a new celebrity already, I am very proud of you." Henrietta laughed.

"This really isn't anything funny. I can barely walk down a street in a straight line." Just as Saito was complaining with a rather displeased voice, the food were delivered. Though said money was tight, the food was nothing less than extravagant. Looks like even Henrietta agrees that a quiet place like this would be the best to express her gratitude towards Saito and Louise.

As the red wine and food are constantly emptied and refilled, soon the topic turned towards the war of Gallia.

"That was a horrifying fireball....."



Henrietta stuttered, unable to contain her feelings. Louise and Saito also began remembering the simply enormous fireball, then exchanged painful looks. One wrong step back then and they would have all been burnt to ashes in that devilish fire.

"A war with elves capable of harnessing such unimaginable magic, such foolish actions will never happen again in history." Henrietta concluded.

"I also think so", Louise nodded her head.

Henrietta gently put down her wineglass full of red wine. The smile on her face had already disappeared. Looks like they have arrived to today's main topic. Saito and Louise both sat up straight.

"Right now, our most urgent matter is to prevent Gallia from being controlled like a puppet by Romalia."

Considering the same thing, Saito and Louise both nodded. "I can't imagine Tabitha could have done that sort of thing."

"Me neither. She is a friend of yours, right? That alone is enough to be described as trustworthy..... yet still, inexplicable things can happen to the contrary of everyone's expectations."

"Then.... what are we to do?"

"I want the both of you to act as my Gallian diplomat."

Looks like what Henrietta is considering, is for them to act as the channel between Tristain and the Gallian Queen Tabitha. Certainly, there could not be a better choice other than them.

"Will you be able to handle it?"

How could there be any objections when the Queen has already suggested so. In fact, this was the work they were looking forward to.

"We happily agree."

"Perfect. And here I was concerned about what to do if you had refused. Well, I

can't let you relax just yet. The first task shall be attending the celebratory party of Gallia's new coronation, basically."

After flashing her bright white teeth, Henrietta peacefully said "Next, before we get to Louise..... about the matter of Saito being a diplomat, I find your name too short."

"Really? And I thought Saito Chevalier De Hiraga was already long enough." From the perspective of a Japanese, that is very long indeed. It would definitely cause a lot of trouble for people making autobiographies.

"That's because Saito is originally a peasant," Louise concluded as if it was the most obvious thing in the world.

"According to me, I believe we should lengthen that name just a little bit more."

Henrietta's words made Louise widen her eyes. Not suspecting anything, Saito replied in confusion, "Eh? What? Lengthening the name like Hiraga Edmond something?"

"Y-your highness? That, that means.... That is, that, which, that...." Louise's face turned red and was then drained of blood, her mouth opening and closing like a fish gasping for air. The impact of the news has made her mind disconnect with her body.

"That's right. Granting him lands." Lands, only after hearing this did Saito inadvertently sprayed red wine over the table. "What? What? Did you say lands! Lands!!"

Henrietta nodded affirmatively.

"Near the west side of Tristain, there is a piece of land called Ornières. Unfortunately, it is only a small 30 **allubon** sized land...."

30 **allubons**..... Saito stayed silent to conserve power for calculations inside his head. That's almost about 10,000 square metres of land! Since ancient times, in the modern day Japan, how many people are able to own such a large piece of land.

"Small? Not small at all! That's, that's too wasteful!" Saito defended, but

Henrietta's expressions remained calm.

"Oh? Aren't you searching for a residence anyway?"

Reminded of this topic, Louise blushed, Saito was even more frantic.

"What are you talking about! Sleep, wake up, stand, sit, eat, our room is more than enough already! I really don't need a land large enough to build a hotel! Just imagine cleaning the place!"

"With exception of cleaning, can't you give your people the rest of the tasks?"

With the questions being solved one after another, Saito quietly whispered to the Louise beside him, "People?"

"You really are thick headed, being granted lands means that you are the lord of those lands, you are the master of the castle."

"Master of the castle? M-me?"

"I also agree that this status seems out of place with you." So that's what Louise was thinking about. Guiche became a Chevalier while Tiffania and herself became priests. Although she knew that the most contributing person, Saito, would not go unrewarded, this was entirely out of her expectations.

In addition, Saito being a landlord would seem just like a crude joke.

"Why would it seem out of place? If I were to really repay Saito's contributions, this hardly seems even. In fact, I even originally considered giving Saito the rank of a Duke...." Then, as if considering it seriously, Henrietta sank further into her seat.

"Duke! That's too much of a waste!"

"Therefore, I do not plan to put Saito in a position which draws jealousy easily. Let's forget it this time. But still, this plot of land is rather valuable indeed. Although small, its actual revenue reaches as high as 12,000 **ingots**. There are vineyards at the bottom of the hills nearby, producing more than a hundred barrels of red wine a year."

Just the numbers were enough to make one faint. Although not exactly sure in actual value, already it seems like Saito has just become a billionare. 10,000 **ingots** were eye-popping already, not to mention a value higher than that. Each year!

"It'd be impossible for Saito to manage lands!" Louise said. Henrietta shrugged as if not a problem, "Oh? Couldn't you just hire a manager? You could always live somewhere else and just leave all the tasks up to the manager. There's lot of nobles who do it this way as well. In fact, I could introduce you to some excellent officers I know."

If Henrietta says so, then Louise has little left to counter. Certainly, numerous nobles give their lands to someone to handle, live in Tristainia and focus only on the fields of politics. As a matter of fact, there are plenty of nobles who have never set foot in their own lands. All they had to do was to set up a trusty manager, then sit back and wait for the money to roll in.....

"There's a mansion you know. After graduating, wouldn't it be nice to live there. Anyway, how does taking a tour first sound?"

Louise nodded to Henrietta's suggestion. Looking to her side, Saito was already in the clouds, mumbling broken sentences. "I am.... master of the castle..... what to do. What to....."

Louise kicked the Saito drifting off to la la land. "Ow!"

"Her majesty is with us. Watch yourself."

Saito calmed down and tried thinking straight. Regardless of what's said, lands is still..... Even just the title of Chevalier, Saito has already find it hard to bear....

Is this really okay? Saito questioned himself. He wasn't the only one who did all the work; what about the Water Spirit Ondine Knights, Tiffania, even Louise..... Romalian generals, soldiers, everyone put in their own efforts, whether it's a large or small effort. A war cannot be achieved by one person alone.

Of course, Romalia is another country. Louise should have been rewarded too, but..... it feels as if he was the only one commended for his actions, or so he thought. "Hmm-, I just don't feel worthy of it.... at least give something more to my mates, would that be possible?" Saito said. Henrietta seemed even more

uninterested and added, "If so, then why don't we take a share of your salary and give it to the knights, what do you think? As for how much exactly, I'll leave it up to you."

Being answered so, Saito have even lost his chance to refuse. He looked at Louise, who gave him a "you're hopeless" nod.

"....Alright. But, is this really fine?"

The numbers does seem a little overwhelming. So far, his yearly salary is around 600 **ingots**. That is a large amount already....., 12,000 **ingots** is far beyond imagination.

Henrietta stopped her hands in the middle of dining and turned towards Saito. "If I am not able to do as little as that, it would dictate my conscience. Compared to other things, not repaying a debt is the thing I can least tolerate."

For a short moment, the eyes of Henrietta and Saito met. As if pressured by her looks, Saito turned his face away. "I understand. I will gratefully accept it."

"Please do. Afterwards I will send someone with the documents over."

The dining continued...., but Louise mind was somewhere else.

Saito's lands? Really?

There are two types of nobles. Feudal nobles with lands and those who serve the government through politics. Although in name both kinds are nobles, in reality, there's a mountain of a difference. Politicians and generals only relying on salary seldom have much money. Even merchants on the streets are more likely to be richer.

But, as for nobles with lands, endless riches can be made. Most certainly, a couple dozen percentage of tax is imminent. Still, the revenue is humongous.

In short, Saito became an overnight millionare. Reminded of the words of innkeeper Scarron, Louise started to become uneasy. *As soon as popularity rises, so does the people unpleasant to you.* Just the fact of being praised as a hero on the streets have caused quite a number of nobles unhappy..... imagine how large of a jealousy would there be when the news of being granted lands spread? *Have*

your highness considered about this?

At the same time, another sort of unease rose.

Don't tell me.... her majesty..... Then shook her head. Didn't Henrietta once say to her , "Loneliness, little people of whom I can trust, this is certainly a great distress" those sort of words?

Therefore, this time there should also be no meaning other than "repaying a debt". Certainly, Henrietta didn't seem to have any other sort of meanings behind this.

But... is that really so?

No matter how close their relationship, it is impossible to know what is really in the other's mind.

"If only I knew of her inner thoughts."

Eventually, she unconsciously came to that.

Louise shook her head. *Is Henrietta not my best friend? If I can't trust even my best friend, what am I doing here?*

Anyhow, Saito's future has never seemed brighter. Throughout the long history of Tristain, a peasant boy being granted land is unprecedented. At least in the long history Louise is informed of.

As Henrietta have once described - a hero whose name will be passed on forever, this not a cliche anymore.

The more Saito seems to be shining, the more lonely Louise seems to be.

"A Saito like that, am I really fit to be with him?"

A legendary void user.... yet unable to use those spells with ease.

Unlike someone like her, wouldn't a more superior woman be fit for Saito?

Considering what she has and what she does not, Louise felt as if she was the most unspectacular, smallest creature in the world.

"What's wrong, Louise?"

Noticing Henrietta looking at her with a worried expression, Louise lifted her head "N-nothing! Boy, this red wine tastes excellent!" In panic, Louise raised the glass in front of her.

"After graduating, do you plan to get married?"

Louise stood up from her seat to immediately voice, "Eh? No, impossible! There's no way that's going to happen!"

"Is, is that so?"

"From the looks of it..... there's no need to get married just because we'll live together..... it'll only be an extension of the situation now. Isn't that obvious."

Hearing so, Saito drooped his shoulders out of disappointment.

No, I don't mean that was what Louise wanted to say, but her thoughts just a while ago has stopped her from comforting so.

An awkward silence began to fall upon the room and the three of them stayed still.

Am I really the girl fit for Saito?

Can I make Saito happy? In the midst of this dense atmosphere, Louise continued contemplating these questions.

Chapter 4 - Mother and Cousin

This is the capital of the Kingdom of Gallia, Lutece. At a corner of the Palace of Versellaies, a new palace was being constructed near the crumbled moss covered walls.

Marble from the veins in the mountains were ferried towards the temporarily built harbour, then carted all the way to the centre of this new palace and piled there.

Numerous masons were gathered all over the Kingdom of Gallia to cut, shave, and improve the quality of the marbles. These stonemasons have a mage's background. They can control the Earth-class magic. 3 days work of stonemasons only by labour can be done in mere hours by them.

According to tradition, although construction work has nothing to do with nobility, this tradition does not hold when constructing palaces.

In order to please the newly crowned Queen, all the laborers and nobles were working hard and bathed in sweat.

"Hey! Over there! Don't stop!" Yelled the supervisor aggressively. On closer look, turns out a bunch of stonemasons were resting under the shades of a tree. With summer approaching, working under such burning sunlight is most certainly hard to bear with.

"If you want to complain, complain to the sun. Summer's here." A worker said while wiping off his dripping sweat. Other masons also nodded smiling.

"We can't use magic, cutting stones is all done manually, there's going to be no work done if our bodies don't work. I'm sure you understand even our bodies have its limit."

The supervisor sat down near them and surveyed every one of them.

True, all of them looked exhausted already. It can't be deemed that they were lazing off. If one had keep pushing them to work, fainting or getting a heatstroke is certainly a possibility.

"I understand. But if so, today's salaries will be reduced half."

"How could you, that's outrageous!"

"I don't have much choice here, you've only finished half of the work, if you want to blame, blame the sun."

The workers all stood up, their eyes blazing with fury. "Please sir, that won't do!"

"What do you want to do? Rebel? A bunch of scums!"

The moment this came out, other angry stonemasons also glared at him. These are all highly skilled stonemasons with a high self-esteem.

Not only do they have great handicraft skills, a lot of them despise nobles. Under circumstances like these, arguments like these often happen.

Carrying the chisels and tools, the stonemasons began to gather around them.

The supervisor held his wand nervously. Even if magic was used to disperse the crowd, this amount of people would seem too much. And so, an uneasy tension began to hang in the air.

All of a sudden, a cool breeze brushed passed them.

"What's going on?"

The icy wind carrying a small hint of snow drove away the heat on the bodies of these people from the cruel unforgiving sun.

"This feels so good, only if this could last longer."

Not only did it cool down their bodies, it also cooled their hotheadedness. The dangerous looks on the workers began to disappear as well.

"If you sir could also do that for us too then nothing like this would have ever happened."

The supervisor turned around, then couldn't help but gasp as soon as he saw the person behind him. "Your majesty...."

What surprised him was the young Queen Tabitha who had just been crowned not long ago. Under the blue hair, her clear eyes gave off a chilling stare. A cape signifying royalty enwrapped her small fragile body, who was followed by a few royal subjects behind her.

The stonemasons were also shocked frozen and the uneasiness began to hang in the air yet again. Everyone lowered their head. Without expressions, Tabitha pointed the large staff which had just casted the icy wind just now towards the supervisor.

Expecting to be questioned, the supervisor lowered his head apologetically in respect "M-my sincere apologies, I will definitely punish them....."

But, Tabitha's answer was by far different from his expectations.

"Use your wand to create 'wind' to cool down the stonemasons like what I did just now."

Hearing the Queen's words, the workers all cheered. The supervisor on the other hand widened his eyes. Making winds will not speed up the processing of the stones, besides, isn't his job supposed to overlook these stonemasons, not to serve them. There's only one supervisor here.

"A-aristocrats 'cooling down' these workers, is that your excellency's meaning?"

Tabitha nodded.

"But, how could we use the sacred power from god to do these kind of stuff?!"

Tabitha replied coldly with no emotion in her voice "This is more efficient."

In a short period of time, a bunch of good-for-nothings aristocrats were gathered, then distributed to different places and began making wind.

With a new method to cool down, the stonemasons naturally went back to their tasks gleefully. There could be nothing better than having these arrogant nobles making wind for them.

"This Queen, compared to the last one, is very different."

"Although young, she really knows how to manage her country."

Different sorts of praises came from the stonemasons. Although Tabitha heard their discussion, like always she winced her eyes and went back to the courtyard, as if sleepy.

Next to Tabitha, a man in priest clothes muttered to himself meaningfully. "Her highness seems more and more like a worthy King."

"I am only doing what needs to be done to make sure everything goes smoothly."

Hearing Tabitha say so, this man is priest clothes..... this red clothed deacon dispatched from Romalia, Bishop **Barry Bernoulli ()** shook his head.

He is the assistant Chancellor in addition to being the main diplomat between Gallia and Romalia ever since Tabitha was coronated. After this coup d'etat, Gallia has changed to a new system imitating that of Tristain's, Bishop being the Prime Minister..... in short, all personnel chosen were people close to the Pope.

Since coronation, there has been so far no interference from Romalia. If the four void mages are incomplete, the revival of the void would have no where to begin. It is also probably the reason why they haven't intereferred with Gallia.

Tabitha, on the other hand, did not hold such optimistic views. *They must have some sort of intention*

"From the looks of the progress, we should be in time for the celebration."

Tabitha nodded. Everyone was awaiting the completion of the new Palace and the grand celebratory part at the Palace of Versallies.

Numerous people of high status will be attending this party. It will be grabbing world-wide attention, the first official banquet since she is made Queen. Of course, the Pope of Romalia and Queen Henrietta will be attending as well.

Tabitha headed towards Petite Troyes.

Some time ago when they entered Lutece, the owner of the place, Princess Isabella, was nowhere to be found. All the nobles assumed to be supportive of the previous regime would either be thrown into jail, declared exile into some

villages, or in the best possible case, be granted a title without any actual power.

Despite the throughout displacement of these nobles, Princess Isabella has yet to be found.

At the gate of Petite Troys, Tabitha ordered everyone to take leave.

Therefore, the loyal subjects who had been following Tabitha all left, the most annoying person **Barry Bernoulli** not excluded.

Towards the young Queen who had led them back to freedom again, the Orleans supporting nobles took a deep bow towards Tabitha before leaving.

Returning a bow to these loyal subjects, Tabitha opened the gate towards Petite Troyes. Having visited this place countless times as a Knight of the Nothern Parterre, she headed directly towards the bedroom.

Not long ago Isabella was still using this room. Tabitha recalled the number of times she had received Isabella's commands in the same room. Now, Tabitha casually inspect items to her will.

At the time when she was still receiving orders as a knight, never had she thought about one day become the owner of this place. That time, except for revenge, she had considered nothing else.

The linens, the quilt, even the bed was the same.

Some of her retainers suggested tearing this place down and decorating it all over, but Tabitha refused. Furniture is furniture, regardless of who uses it it will never loses its original function.

Tabitha casually took off her dresses as a Queen and her crown, changing into normal clothes, then sat on the bed.

She eyed the crown sitting on the desk. She was given this just to save the soldiers and knights deployed at the Lelion river.

Only because the Saito imitation said that this would be a better choice did she choose to this.....

But now the objective has changed.

'To interrupt the Crusade begun by Romalia'

To be able to achieve that, she'd have to first become Queen. As long as it can be stopped, she would gladly give the throne away to any suitable noble.

No..... there's no need for a king or a queen, it can also be achieved by gathering wise and powerful subjects and letting them manage. Why is it necessary for the King to manage politics personally?

It's exactly because of this unnecessary crown did her father and his brother began this ridiculous fight....

Regardless, whether it's ceding the throne or simply taking off the crown, these are all future events. After all, since that, there has not been a demand from Romalia so far. Just this fact is enough to render Tabitha feeling helpless.

Most likely, one day Romalia will ask Gallia for assistance in the Crusade. Although they have still yet to gather all four void mages, those people at Romalia will never give up. As long as they are not able to attain the legendary power, they will always trigger a crusade with all the power they can achieve in real life.

And right this moment, there could not be a better power in real life than the humongous ground forces of Gallia.

Contemplating this, suddenly a noise sounded in the room. It was Sylphid in human form. Dressed in a priestess' clothes, she showed off the dishes she'd carried in her hands and place them in front of Tabitha.

"Haa, considering so much even although you are Queen already. Look, I even brought you food. How are you supposed to think without energy!" As the familiar of Tabitha, Sylphid has recently put more effort into assisting Tabitha once she had become Queen. Still, no matter what, there's no way for Sylphid to like the clothes she's wearing right now, and will be constantly complaining.

"These sort of dresses are always in the way, why must I be dressed like the other female officers."

Unlike the times when Tabitha was still a student, as a Queen, her every movement will be the attention of the general public. As a dragon, there would be lots of restrictions in many fields, which is why Sylphid can only stay in human form. In short, in front of other people, a dragon must never say a word.

"....." Tabitha took a spoon while considering all sorts of things. Sylphid kept urging Tabitha to eat more, at the same time stuffing food into her mouth with bare hands. "C'mon, eat, this is good."

In no time, the dishes were quickly emptied. Sylphid shook her head, a face full of anxiety "See, because Nee-sama didn't eat any, everything has been eaten already!" Seeing how Tabitha still has no intention to open her mouth, Sylphid continued "Speaking of which, I really don't have a lot of good memories in this place. It's all because of that horrible cousin. I wonder where did she hide, if I ever find her I'll definitely chew her to pieces."

Just as Sylphid was saying so, a knight's voice came from outside. "Captain of the Knights of the Eastern Parterre Bartolomeo is here to see your majesty."

Tabitha dressed back into her royal robes.

Suddenly came Bartolomeo, an extremely loyal person towards Tabitha and has once again been knighted as a parterre knight. A few missing members were also replaced by young ambitious nobles, the numbers reaching around 30. Leaving all sorts of unimportant tasks to the co-captain to manage, the captain only accepts direct orders from Tabitha herself.

Although his title is still the same, compared to the royal guards, his team is more like Tabitha's personal bodyguards. On the other hand, Bartolomeo personally considers himself to be Tabitha's most loyal family.

Seeing Tabitha dressed all up like a Queen, Bartolomeo couldn't help but cry emotionally. Everytime encountering Tabitha since she had been coronated, he would get teary eyed.

"Your deceased father Orleans will most certainly be happy for you in the otherworld too."

Because there's no time to get all emotional over these things, Tabitha hurried Bartolomeo to cut to the chase.

His face quickly changed to a cheerful one, and then clapped his hands once. Subsequently, a knight waiting outside the gate brought in a woman with both her hands tied together. Sylphid cried out in surprise, "Oh, it's the arrogant princess."

"Yes, she was hiding in the restricted grounds of a monastery, but was eventually discovered."

Being tied both hands to the back, Isabella's expressions were one of being greatly insulted and angered. A few months ago, she had never thought of a day like this happening to her. More ironically, the place she is taken to right now is the place she had been issuing orders all along.

It's all Tabitha's fault, completely switching the status upside down., Isabella glared at Tabitha.

"Then, she is all yours, your highness." Saying so, Bartolomeo took his leave, leaving only the once-princess and crowned once-knight of the Northern Parterre.

Excluding Sylphid, there is basically only two people left. Isabella seemed spiritless, but not only did she not beg for mercy, she cursed "Come~ Kill me, kill! Like what you did to father, use your magic to send me to my grave."

Isabella's voice was full of hatred, even shocking Sylphid. Tabitha was on the other hand completely unharmed, only staring at Isabella without twitching as much as a muscle.

"What wrong, why aren't you doing it. Use the same pair of hands which took father's crown to do the same thing to his daughter."

"Who took the crown in the first place?!"

In chorus to the cries of Sylphid, Tabitha raised her staff. Fear could be seen in Isabella's eyes, fear towards the magic about to strike her.

Is it blades of the winds or ice arrows? Chopping her head off, stabbing through her chest? Isabella was waiting for her execution.

Tabitha chanted a short, simple magic.

"....!"

Isabella suddenly felt a softness. Her tightly shut eyes were irresistibly opened. What shocked her was the rope that originally tied both her hands was cut.

In a flash, the Isabella who'd regained freedom grabbed the paper knife on the table and charged towards Tabitha.

"I'll avenge my father!"

However, the paper knife did not go into Tabitha's chest. As if losing its target, the knife stopped wobbly in front of Tabitha's chest.

Not because Tabitha used magic, nor because Sylphid stopped her, but because Isabella paused herself.

"Why didn't you kill me? Because you pity me?"

Tabitha shook her head helplessly.

"I don't hate you."

Hearing this sentence, the knife in Isabella's hands clattered to the floor.

"You say you don't hate me? I insulted you so much before! Why, are you dumb?! Or are you pretending to be all great and mighty? What meaning could there be!"

Tabitha stared at Isabella and answered tiredly "....I need companions."

"Your meaning is that you want me to become your companion? That is the most ridiculous thing i have ever heard. You killed my father, took my throne, and now you want to be friends? Don't kid with me." Isabella laughed as if she had gone insane.

Gradually, her laughter became more and more quiet..... slowly turning into silent weeping.

"I knew a long time ago," forced Isabella between her tears "about making the frightening fireball with elves which burnt the dual-use fleet to ashes..... about

how he chose to suicide with the same magic..... and also about killing your father, not caring about me at all, not even as much as feelings towards me as a normal person....."

Isabella stuttered, "But, he is still my father."

The moonlight shown into Petite Troyes. While Isabella was weeping, the quiet Sylphid brought over a bottle of grape wine. With a swift swoop, a wineglass appeared in both person's hands. Isabella stared into the glass of wine in her hands, then as if giving up struggling, gulped down the whole glass.

Afterwards, no one spoke a word.

"I will follow you."

"I, had always been ashamed of myself in front of you. Just like how my father was towards yours..... Duke of Orléans. Your skills in magic is incredible, you are loved by everyone. I on the other hand, am neither of those. Therefore..... that crown suits you more."

Tabitha emptied her glass silently, then reached out to the cousin who was once her hatred enemy. Isabella took her hand and softly kissed her fingernails, then the two embraced. Still..... the embrace was rather rigid. Yes, not all grudges between them have been eliminated yet.

Tabitha waited for Isabella to rise, then told her quietly, "follow me."

"To where?"

"There's a person I want you to meet."

Tabitha brought a slightly stunned Isabella into a deep part of Petite Troyes, facing an eerily quiet room.

At the door of that room, a soldier was standing guard. Seeing Tabitha, he first bowed, then pressed a doorbell. From inside the room, an old butler greeted them.

"I see your majesty has arrived. Madam is awaiting for you upstairs for dinner."

"**Bernard ()** , we have an extra guest"

This old butler named **Bernard** widened his eyes as soon as he noticed the guest behind Tabitha.

"She is.....!"

Isabella has no recollection towards this old butler.

"What a surprise!.... It actually is her! Unbelievable!"

Bernard's expressions changed yet again, now looking at Tabitha with an expression asking "is this really alright".

Tabitha nodded.

Being guided to the centre of the room, Isabella's heart thumped as if a church bell telling the time. She faintly knows who to expect inside the room.

Behind the corridor was the dining room. There came soft candlelights, as well as the mouthwatering aroma of spices.

Isabella could not gather her courage to walk into the room no matter what, only capable of standing still in the corridor. Tabitha held Isabella's hand.

"Wai....."

Tabitha shook her head, as if telling her not to hesitate. With a newly found determination, Isabella walked into the dining room.

The person sitting at the dining table opened asked "Oh, do we have a guest here?"

Hearing this voice, Isabella's whole body shuddered, draining all her power. That person..... was none other than Tabitha's mother who had been forced to drink poison..... the wife of Orleans.

However, this person seems different from the past duchess of Orleans. What originally looked like a skeleton wrapped in skin, is now more ample to a certain degree. Most importantly, one can see life in her eyes. Her every actions are now

more elegant. Isabella simply cannot believes her eyes, and stared at the duchess.

After returning victorious to Lutece, Tabitha ordered the still imprisoned Bidashal to brew an antidote, which successfully helped her mother regained consciousness.

After producing the antidote, Bidashal left and returned to his home in the desert. The reunited mother and daughter did not have many conversations much less deep ones. Tabitha fulfilled her lifetime wish, to help her mother regain consciousness, and her mother managed to find her daughter, not a doll anymore.

The Orleans Duchess sees Isabella, but the expressions on her face did not change. Not only so, she stood up and pulled a chair for her niece to sit down.

"Long time no see, Isabella."

"Au-aunty...?" Feeling the condemn of her conscience, Isabella stood dumbfounded.

"That's right, I am your aunty. Why are you still standing here? Come and have a seat. The food is almost cold already."

Hearing her words, both Tabitha and Sylphid grabbed a seat. This faithful familiar of Tabitha's, although is not a noble but only a dragon, she is a valued partner of Tabitha.

Stiff having rigid expressions, Isabella sat down. Finally thinking of something, Isabella said, "You..... you don't blame me?"

"Blame? Why would I say that! Why must I blame my own niece?"

"I am the one, the daughter of the one who murdered your husband, who made you lose consciousness."

"But I have already regained consciousness."

"But Duke of Orléans will never come back."

Sighing deeply, the duchess said, "It's almost like a dream, except that I remember everything. All of the things did happen in real life.... yes. Even if I

wanted to, I could never forget."

"Then, why?" Isabella cried out.

The duchess gazed towards Tabitha. Tabitha nodded.

"Your father isn't here anymore, taking countless knights and soldiers to the otherworld with him..... to me, everything is enough. I don't want to see anymore blood flowing. Much less, my own niece's blood."

"Aunt...."

"Let me tell you both a story from a long time ago. My husband..... Duke of Orléans, once said to me, 'I must make Gallia an even more powerful country'. Yes, Gallia is a large country, but we have not been able to congregate and merge into one united system. The nobles in the country have all forgotten their previous pride, all of the people only cares about the profit in front of them. My husband saw through this all, which is why he said such words. Also.... Isabella, your father, must have once hoped to make this country a better place, only somehow forgetting himself while doing so. Although I have a slight idea why..... it is already pointless to raise the question again anymore. All I can hope for now is to fulfil my husband's wishes."

Isabella nodded her head. Duchess Orleans raised her wineglass and indicated her daughter and niece to do the same.

Raising her glass, Isabella noticed that other than the dining utensils placed for them, there is one extra set. With a quick guess, Isabella assumes this is probably here for Duke of Orléans.

"....this set is for uncle's I guess? Then, let me offer my respects."

But Duchess Orleans shook her head.

"This set is for the war just now..... for all the soldiers who have sacrificed their lives. They, are only dead because of our own conflicts. I can only wish for their peace in heavens, and hope never to make the same mistake."

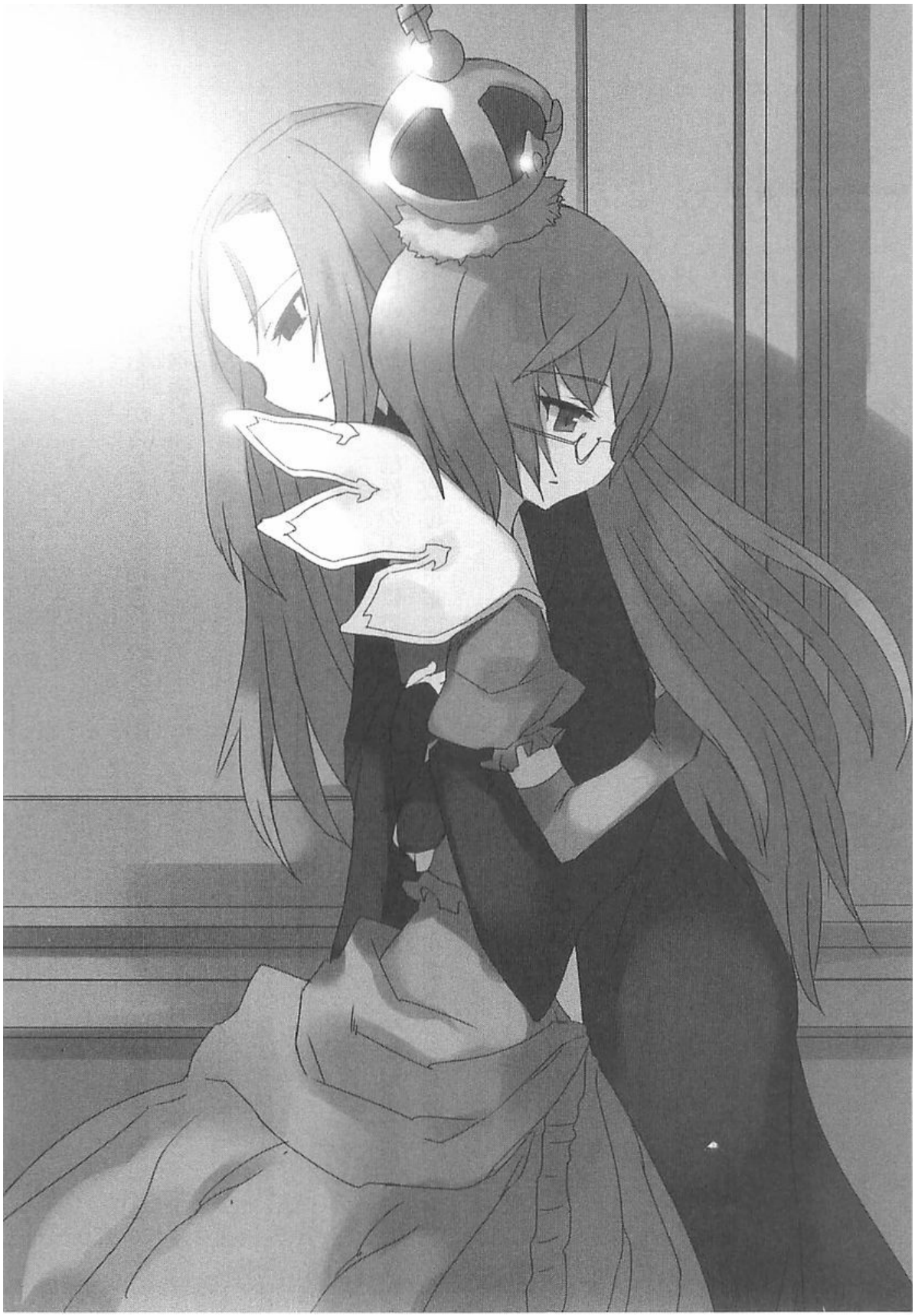
Hearing her words, Isabella lowered her head deeply.

"Anyhow, there's only the three of us left in our family..... I hope the both of you will work hard together, be together with each other peacefully." When she has reached the words "three of us", Duchess Orleans' voice began to tremble. However..... neither the emotional Isabella nor Tabitha noticed this point.

Isabella started at Tabitha and her aunt. Yes, they are her own family left. Thinking back, their family..... really have spent a lot of time hating each other. Brothers, sisters.....

"How foolish is this."

How much has been sacrificed because of this hatred? Countless lives. The collapse of Grand Troyes..... as the survivors of these foolish actions, she will most definitely spend the rest of her life to cleanse these sins.



Isabella shook her head. She feels the hatred in her heart gradually changing into love and acceptance. Only now did she realize how similar these feelings actually were.

Moved by her aunt's words, Isabella stood up. Tabitha followed suit. The two of them walked close and embraced again.

This time, it's a real embrace from the bottom of their hearts.

After dinner, on the path of Petite Troyes..... Isabella told Tabitha, "Hey, little Helene."

A long time ago.... while they were still young, while they were still playing like real sisters, Isabella once called Tabitha with her surname. Aunt's teachings just now, has made Isabella recalled this title again, and therefore decided to try it.

"What's the matter," asked Tabitha with a calm voice.

"Although just now I said that I'd follow you..... I want to take leave, is that alright?"

"Why?"

"I want to become a nun. I want to repay my father's sins. I want to pray each day, for father, for uncle, for all the people who've died..... this is what I think I should do."

But, Tabitha shook her head.

"Helene?"

"I require your company of knights."

"Knights of the Northern Parterre?"

"Yes." Tabitha nodded lightly. This was the department she once belonged to herself, a secretive knight corps dealing with all sorts of dirty work..... For the sake of going against Romalia, their power is required no matter what.

"Is that so, well then I guess I have little choice. Affirmative," so Isabella said.

None of the members of Knights of the Northern Parterre know each other, and the only one wielding all their information is their leader, Isabella here.

"But, do not expect them to be as fully capable as they used to be," Isabella sighed.

"What do you mean?"

"I.... while I was in hiding, tried making contact with the most talented knights..... but couldn't no matter what. After they heard news of father's death, they seem to be in hiding. Relationships built with money aren't solid after all."

"The most talented knights, 'them'?"

"Yes. Although Knights of the Northern Parterre usually execute missions in solo, there is one group of knights which is different. They are four siblings working together. In detail, they were comparable to who you used to be..... perhaps even better. Of course, that's only from the perspective of handling dirty work. After all, never once have they failed."

"But now, they're gone. Maybe that's for the better."

"Why?"

"Because they were well known for their cruelty and cunning tricks. For money they would gladly do anything. Most likely, they have sought a new sponsor."

"What are their names?" Feeling a sense of uneasiness, Tabitha asked.

"The Elemental Siblings."

Chapter 5: Saito Chevalier De Hiraga Des Ornières

Des Ornières, the land granted to Saito by Henrietta, was in the west of Tristain, a distance of about one hour's ride. If one was leaving from the magic academy or from Tristain, the time it took to get to Des Ornières hardly changed. The week just before the beginning of the summer holidays, Saito and Louise left quickly to inspect the land. It was assumed that the two would go alone, but, as expected, the number of companions increased.

"God ... this already seems like a noble procession." Louise said sulkily.

Land was given to Saito! So using that as an excuse, Guiche, leading the Undine boys (The Knights of the Holy Water Spirit) and Kirche, tired of waiting for Colbert, who had not yet arrived from Aquileia, soon arrived first.

Siesta, of course loaded with a mountain of cleaning utensils, also joined. She was the first that, even without seeing the mansion, wanted to thoroughly inspect every corner of it.

"Des Ornières, what kind of place is it?" Malicorne’s face revealed his great curiosity in the question.

"No idea. How am I supposed to know that?" Saito said with a calm expression, responding to him.

"How much is the annual income of this land?"

Recalling the words of Henrietta:

"12,000 Ecus" Saito said, at the sound of all breathlessly gasping.

"Knights! I've been thinking of recommending Saito to be the sponsor of our

corps!" Reynald proclaimed loudly. Nobody objected. Resonant voices were heard all at once.

"What is a sponsor?" Saito asked. Louise answered with an angry voice:

"Obviously, you will pay them the whole."

"Well, since I'm the vice-commander after all..." Saito nodded gently. Then Guiche was heard murmuring in a voice almost inaudible:

"Saito, really, I've been thinking we should all have the same uniform for our corps, but..."

An even angrier Louise replied:

"You are the commander, so do something. Are you not a member of the noble Gramont family?"

"You do not realize that we used the resources we had last season and..."

"And what... Now I remember; back there you used 500 ECU for Monmon! Give them back!"

Upon hearing this, everyone there wore a face of disappointment. Seeing that, Saito declared with an expression as if to say "I will take care of it"

"Do not put on that face, I get it, it's not like I want all the money for myself. It's not as if I had won it by a large merit."

"If you think this is better, I can set aside a part of that money every year to the corps. Do you agree with this?"

"How much, Saito? How much will be fine!?" Reynald asked anxiously.

"How much would be OK...?"

Reynald look at the faces of all those present and said with a calm expression "5000 ECU."

"Understood. I will invest that amount each year."

An "ooooooohhh" resounded from everyone. That absurdly generous offer from Saito provoked Louise. Her face went blue.

"Wait! Hey you! That's almost half!"

"Never mind, I’m fine with it, it’s not as if they were a necessity. Moreover, there is nothing in particular you will need them for. Aahhhh, will you need it for something?"

"Yes, you will need it, you are the vice commander of the imperial guard, and you just have been made a landlord, money and other benefits are things that would have to come to you, not to mention that you do not come from a noble family, or have a employer, you're just an upstart! That makes you an easy target for many. If you're not careful it will surely be a mess."

Saito just watched Louise who kept muttering complaints. *Louise has been unusually awful. Bahh, she always has been an angry person, but lately it seems like anything she sees or hears makes her mad.*

Is it something that Siesta made to me? He thought that at first, but apparently it was something different. After inspecting the situation and feeling the tension in the air, he remembered something Scarron told him to do in cases like this, but ended up saying nothing.

But ... from the granting of Henrietta, her mood was worsening. Why? Everything went just fine! And on top of that, 12,000 ECU! Saito could not understand the reason for the unusual moodiness in Louise. But, after thinking calmly...

Is it that, even now, Louise is wary of my relationship with the Princess? It was during the celebration' s dance... When Louise saw, from the curtain behind him… Saito kissing the princess… Saito had remembered. *However ... At that time the Princess was not herself. She was sad, and needed to be next to someone. Was it coincidence that at that moment I was alone with her...?*

Of course Louise knew that, but it seems that she was not able to accept it.

If I were in your place...

For example, if I saw Louise in a similar scene?

Maybe I'd be like that... "It would be natural to be burning with jealousy" Saito thought.

In truth there is nothing between me and the princess, and…

Just when Saito thought that ... Saito briefly felt as if something pricked him in his chest. There was a moment when he thought "hee? That's impossible. The princess was sad, I just served to give her some comfort..."

But this anxiety that pricked like a thorn, that feeling of unease, remained in Saito's chest.

What's happening to me? What is it that is worrying me? Then Saito shook his head.

"Hey you, what are you doing?" After Louise said that, Saito regained consciousness.

Somehow, he still did not understand the real reason for his concerns.

"I-It's nothing! Seriously!"

At the moment Louise tried to question him again, Kirche said something that was obviously said just to annoy her.

"Louise, you complain and want to control how Saito spends his money, are you trying to act as the protector of a noble husband? And tell me you two; do you have planned a wedding after graduation?"

At these words, Saito raised many questions in his head. Seeing a smile on the face of his comrades, Saito could not help but discover himself smiling as well. At that time Louise dragged Kirche at the end of the procession, where they were muttering something quietly so that no one could hear them.

"... This, i-indeed, n-not w-w-why. I-i only c-care about him as a roommate..."

"There will be no wedding, but if… you will live together, no? If you do that, would it not provoke bad rumors?"

"What other people say or think has nothing to do with it! I do not care about

that sort of thing!"

"That’s not it Louise." Kirche told her with her eyes half open.

"It's for Saito!"

"W-what are you saying?"

"You see Louise, Saito is now a national hero, a character who received from Her Majesty the Queen a title and a territory. He may be a newcomer, but he is an upstart that is forging a legend. And also in your country, tell me, is it not mysterious for a commoner to become a noble? He is vice-commander of an imperial body, a landowner and also a character prone to get involved in any drama, which always causes uproar. If a person so famous began to live with a girl who is not married, it would become a scandal, and you're the daughter of a duke…" When she had said this, Kirche gave an "oohohohoho!" laughing loudly.

Part of what she said was already something that was worrying her. This caused her to suddenly raise her voice, saying:

"What's wrong! Are you trying to say I'm not right for being with Saito?"

"Yiaa! It was a joke; you do not need to be angry!" Kirche said with an astonished face. But it could not calm Louise’s irritation after insisting on this point. It was inevitable that her spirits falter.

"Yes, it is ... Like you said. I am insignificant. I do not have a tenth of your chest. I'm not sensual. And also, though I say so myself, I am very irritable. Half of that is his fault but I think I am deeply jealous. My face is cute but my personality is not. So I'm told..."

Is what Louise murmured. Seeing Louise, Kirche said with a look of astonishment:

"Certainly, there may be a better girl out there, less like the Louise that you have become. Someone from a noble family, with a good personality and good looks, a girl like that could be a great opportunity for him."

"Do not talk nonsense! Nobody comes so suddenly and on top of that is from a

noble family. That does not happen! Do not tell me in your country these things happen!"

"Who knows? There may be someone who thinks that a landowner hero is worthy of staying with her daughter ... the world is very big and anything can happen."

Kirche said laughing, while Louise turned blue. After what had been said, in the mind of Louise, it waved a series of thoughts that bothered her...

True, there are not only nobles in Gallia and Tristain. For example, how many are there in Halkeginia… if a grand duke like Kulldenholff is interested in Saito ... “Please take my daughter!” What will I do if that does happen? And if that man were to say, "do it, and one day you will become a king" What will I do? He is carried away so easily; he may suddenly be seduced by an offer.

Louise thought she would find Saito in the forefront surrounded by the entire hubbub… She could not deduct the encouragement of others, who seemed to be enjoying everything carefree. Even Saito looked at Louise as if he was totally calm himself.

"What, but that! Is it not enough for you, the daughter of a duke? Want to be with someone worthy of you!? But really, becoming the husband of the daughter of a grand duke is difficult. Every day will be tied with a string and you can’t go where you want. The day you get to have an affair, you will be locked up in a dungeon where you will be punished every day. Besides, when you get bored you usually forget the manners, are you ready to not?"

Kirche, looking at such a complex Louise, said:

"That would not change anything about how you would treat him."

"C-change."

"In what way?"

"I-if he was unfaithful, I w-would forgive him from the dungeon."

Louise stood her shoulder forcibly saying: "Perhaps I would be less demanding than the daughter of an archduke."

"If there is no choice" Kirche said as she opened her hands.

Meanwhile they arrived to a place that seemed to be the land of Des Ornières but...

"To the best of my sight I can’t see more than a wasteland." Louise said with an air of distrust.

I understood from the queen that this land is suspected to have an annual income of 12000. Rich farmland, grazing land, fishponds, they could not find any of them. On both sides of the road could be observed only empty and desolate land where the only thing that grew was weeds...

"What grass field will be the main product here?" Saito muttered. Passing by, they found a man who appeared to be a farmer pulling a cart.

"Let's ask him!" Then Guiche waved to the man.

"What can I do for you, my lord?" Like his old horse, he was seedy-looking.

"I would like to take some of your time to ask ... Are these Des Ornières lands?"

"These were my master’s land." It was said with a clear voice, with no accent and an excellent pronunciation, with no doubt.

"This is pretty spoiled to be a land of 12,000 in revenue a year."

Hearing this, the old man with a smiling face gave a "hahaha".

"That was before the Lord of this land died, it’s already been 10 years since that. In the absence of an heir, this land was expropriated but ... young people were leaving these lands to go to the city, and everybody who stayed was just too old to take care of it. Only a few dozen of us are still here, and we do our best to continue working the land."

All were blue in the face after hearing that. In response, Saito, with eyes full of compassion, asked, "And… where is the mansion?"

"The mansion? Is that ... if you do not mind, let me guide you there. I have free time to spare."

They walked through a sort of thick forest, as ruined as the rest of the earth. 10 years had passed since the abandonment of the house. It was clear it had not received maintenance.

Previously it could have been a splendid mansion worthy of a noble, but now all that remained after that many years were broken windows, the roof, doors covered with vines, and cracked walls.

"This will be a challenge to clean..." Siesta muttered in a puzzled voice.

"Her Majesty the Queen… why has she given you a land in such bad shape?" Reynald asked. Malicorne nodded.

"No, surely Her Majesty did not know. Maybe she did not remember that it was a land so devoid in all aspects. But if she gave this land to Saito, surely she also ordered anyone looking for a place to settle to come here."

Upon hearing this conversation, "Maa, being the princess, that is possible." Louise said from the bottom of her heart. Surely Henrietta had no bad intentions. Only, as she is supposed to be the queen after all, it’s normal that people expect from her things that are above the clouds.

Certainly if we ask to make arrangements here, it would be solved. And if we say 12,000 annual income, she would see to it that you get it. Although I do not think that she will take charge of the verification.

At the same time, Louise was somehow relieved. Henrietta was the one who gave this land to Saito and it’s really only because she sees him as a vassal. As a princess, giving some land to the man she loves, it is obvious that she would at least verify its condition. That said, it became clear that Louise kept even some suspicion. *The unjustified special treatment for Saito ... displays of affection, those things…*

I can’t deny the recent past, but I do not think it hides bad intentions. I think these were sincere acts.

Let’s see it in the right side. All my fears are absurd.

Thinking of this, Louise could feel her heart filled with enthusiasm. Immediately, Louise was filled with a confidence she could barely contain. *Even*

if she’s a princess, no matter where she comes from, whether she’s a noble or a plebeian, there is no way I could lose to anyone. That's because I am the third daughter of an influential Duke. I can assume that there is no one greater than me in refinement or elegance. I might not have a big chest, but in this world, there is no one that equals my beauty!

It doesn’t matter if he’s a national hero, I do not have to feel indebted to Saito, yes, definitely I do not have to.

"Say you do not compare yourself to me and there is no reason to be so confident."

Louise let out a small smile. *How come just now I was ashamed?*

"Nonsense." *Didn’t I say to myself, I make him the favour of letting me live with him?* "You should be grateful to have the honour to live with me; it is ridiculous to think that I feel indebted to you."

"What? In truth you can live here ..." Saito said crestfallen. Louise then attacked his shoulder.

"Right? Isn't it enough for you?"

"Heee?"

Saito turned his head, and for some reason he saw Louise with a look of triumph on her face. Although a moment ago she was muttering complaints and was discouraged. *What happened that changed her mood so well?*

"What is the matter with you? Hey, Louise ..."

"It's nothing. It's just that the weather was cloudy and overcast."

Saito doubted that was it, but seeing Louise happy compared to how troubled she looked a moment ago, no matter what had happened, it seemed to have improved her mood ... It also somehow managed to cheer him.

"Never mind if this mansion is falling apart. I’m fine with it."

"N-no problem! It’s only a matter of getting used to live here!"

I suppose it will look better when it is cleaned.

"But ... it will be difficult! Aahaahaa"

"Hey, are you really thinking about living here?" Kirche asked, surprising both of them.

"No problem, after all it is the mansion of the land that the princess gave us. If we were to not live here, we might be punished."

"Hey Saito. Buy a fortress, a fortress, let's quickly get out of this haunted mansion!" insisted the Ondin guys, but Saito did not seem to pay attention to them.

No ... on second thought, if we end up buying a fortress with the money, what would we do with the other expenses? And then we would have to make a budget for the maintenance.

"Hey! We could get a lot of revenue if we do heroic actions here and there!"

"Yes, it’s true!"

The young nobles have started talking like they were about to start a worldwide spectacle.

"And what would we do if we get injured? And besides, how many opportunities will we have to do heroic actions? Not many, right? And in the end, we only have 600 ECU of the pension we receive from La Vallière, in which Louise and I use for everyday expenses, and there is also the salary of the maid." Saito said as he directed his gaze to the emaciated mansion.

"Naa, even if it’s not a lot, this land will produce profits. How about it then? Is it okay here, Louise?"

"Yep." Louise nodded. To Siesta, the fact of living with Saito was more than enough, so she had been smiling from the start.

Seeing disappear its 5000 annual ECU, the Ondine boys were now the one with a long face.

Louise and Saito asked a favor to a contractor to repair their mansion for 1000 ECU.

The first day they saw their new home, it discouraged them, but over the days the place had become a decent place to live.

At the time when the summer began, it seemed more and more possible to get accustomed to live in that place. They expected that within a month or two the mansion would be worthy of a noble status to stay in, except for the second floor of the mansion which was covered with a type of discontinued stone.

Right in front of the vestibule stood a fan-shaped staircase. Passing a heavy oak door, there was a huge lounge. When entering on the right, you could find a dining room where you could sit up to 20 people. In the background there was the space for the kitchen.

A room that served as a reception room and study was on the left side.

At the top of the staircase that led on both side to the second floor, there was 6 rooms. As expected, one of those 6 rooms was used as a bedroom. Saito and the others bought a great new bed for that room.

In the garden was a barn and cages that served as home for dogs. It seemed that Mr. Des Ornières was very adept at hunting because they had been splendidly built. Going downstairs was a door leading to the basement, which was firmly closed. They sought for it but they could not find the key, so it was decided to leave it as well.

At this moment, the people that lived on Saito’s land were exclusively composed of elders. However, they still could achieve an income of 2000 ECU. Even if had lost its verve, the worn earth could still get some grapes. The wine that was prepared by the elders was delicious, although little was produced. By sharing it with others, little by little it acquired fame.

Saito and Louise passed calm days at the Magic Academy while they spent their weekend in Des Ornières. Viewing it as repairs progressed in the mansion seemed fun. Calmly, casually visiting Des Ornières, filled them with satisfaction.

On one occasion when Saito and the others came to visit, they did some cleaning with Siesta, ordered new furniture and took a walk around.

They could almost not see the desolate field in the lands of Des Ornières. Also, if you watched closely you could find a lot of entertaining things: a small pond in the forest, a garden, small wildflowers blooming, all this into a walk while watching the scenery. It was a great way to pass the time.

At night, the people of Des Ornières decided to go to greet their new master. They brought the wine that makes them so proud, some fruits they had reaped, freshly baked bread and freshly made sweets, and soon it wasn’t necessary to prepare dinner!

While taking their walk, the villagers were talking about them with animated voices. They knew Saito was a knight of the imperial guard of plebeian origin. They were speaking of him like he was a grandson whom they felt very proud of.

"Hello, hello, please come to visit my humble home, my young lord!"

With that kind of voice they were called, and humbly, they were greeted with tea, alcohol and sweets. Then, they listened to Saito amusing them by telling them stories, their eyes wide open.

"I'm happy that our new lord is this type of person." Saito felt like he was a winner.

Saito hired an old woman from the neighbourhood. Helen, but they called her “Grandmother Helen”, was an elderly woman who was very active for her age. She was taking care of the mansion when Saito and the others were not there.

She was a very wise grandmother and was also very good at housework.

The mansion was very large so Siesta and Grandma Helen were sufficient for the job.

On a table in the bedroom, Saito placed his laptop, watching it every day.

Right now he could not know in what condition his own family was. This was a little frustrating but ... leaving aside that, he thought that his actual life was now very satisfactory.

Someday, a void mage ... maybe Tiffa, maybe Louise, I do not know but, if they

were to remember the spell of "The Gate of the World"… Then I will come back to my city and I'll let them know how I've been.

But what if ... they can't remember?

Somehow, no matter what happens, I'll take it in the best way possible. It was mysterious that Saito could not think that was possible…

But… inside of him, there was a feeling, a conviction. *I may return someday.*

But even if that time comes ... I can't pull the life I lead here.

That's what Saito thought, looking at his side as Louise slept peacefully.

Chapter 6 - Daily Tea Time

At the start of summer vacation, Louise and Saito decided to stay in Des Ornières. This was pratically a rehersal of what life would be after graduation.

Gradually, the two began to get used to this calm, peaceful lifestyle, so carefree that all the events happened a year ago was as if nothing more a mere dream.

Without more than a few days time, Louise's tense nerves had already calmed down.

Saito and Louise, after dismissing the grandmother Helen with a "take care", decided to take a walk in the woods as usual.

Strong rays of sunlight projected through the trees, giving this place a energizing feel. This plot of forest was rid of all sounds other than the chirping of birds; Saito and Louise was walking along this small path.

Behind the two of them, Siesta was carrying a basket and smiling as she followed them. It wasn't long before they found a place with a good view and atmosphere, the perfect location for lunch.

Once filled, Siesta fell asleep lying in the shade of a tree. Seeing so, just to check if Siesta was really asleep, Louise even jabbed her a few times with a branch.

But Siesta's sleeping habits have been established so well that once she had fallen asleep, she will not wake up for at least an hour no matter the circumstances.

After making sure of such, Louise curled up like a kitten into Saito's lap. Then, in a very seductive way, she smirked and started to play with her hair.

Regardless of wherever she had learnt that from, this behaviour was particularly intense to Saito. *Aah..., she, as I thought, can be very cute...*

As if reading Saito's mind, Louise began to intensify her attacks.

"What’s the matter? Do I have something on my face?"

"N-no ... It's not that..."

"Then... why are you staring at me like that?" said Louise with condemning half closed eyelids and in a cool expression. Saito became even more flustered as if a lost sheep without a sense of direction. Saito's voice began to tremble slightly.

"I realized that you are really, really cute..." said Saito in a seemingly recited tone. After all, Saito still isn't used to praising a girl in her face. In rare occasions when he's for some reason filled with a mysterious source of confidence, he may be able to deliver a normal speech all right, but when faced with sudden situations like these, he could not be more unprepared.

Therefore, Louise was enjoying this even more. "Well isn't that obvious? Do you know, there can't be a girl cuter than me in existence?"

"I, I was thinking so too, too....."

Basically, the proud Louise was was like a fire fueled with firewood. As far as Saito knew, there was not another person in the whole wide world and Halkeginia who could fit the attitude Louise had better....

"You sure are lucky. To have someone like me beside you."

"Just, just like that."

"Like what?"

"Like what you said."

Hearing so Louise became even more energized, her superiority starting to affect Saito. Succumbing to Louise, Saito began to ask himself, why does he feel as insignificant as an insect. However, this self-demeaning feeling was soon overwhelmed by his impulses towards Louise, and naturally leaned in to her lips.

"What. What are you trying to do?"

"Ki- kiss..."

"Kiss, who with whom?"

"Me and, Louise."

"Then, you'll have to listen to me first."

Louise stood up and crossed her arms, getting carried away by the situation fervently. Saito used to always call her Lemon-chan, even laughing about her unbelievably small size secretly, but this time she finally got the advantage in her hands.

Now then, what to get him to say...

However..., there wasn't much to have him say given this moment. Only thing Louise could think of was to have him whisper in her ears "I love you..." or something like that, then give her a hug romantically. This was more than enough to Louise, other than this nothing else really mattered. Even Louise began to hate herself for being satisfied too easily, but on the other hand this can't be helped with. After all, even just what was mentioned was enough to have Louise blush and have her heart thump erratically.

"Remember to kiss more ro-romantically."

"That's it?"

"....Mhm."

Saito wasn't too sure about her definition of romantic, therefore put up a serious expression and lifted Louise's chin.

"You are just like a jewel", Saito tried to say so but was so tense that he said it hoarsely, not even daring to look into her eyes. Just as he thought this wasn't going well, Louise was already moved to the point that her eyes were gleaming with tears of joy.

Seeing the almost weeping Louise, *This girl's difficulty level is too low,* Saito sighed. At the same time, looking at the unbelievably easy but incredibly cute Louise, Saito instinctively hugged her tightly and kissed her. Louise, in response,

also hugged Saito's head and closed her eyes dreamily.

At this moment....

Crack, it sounded as if something broke.

Crack, crack, crack crack.

The two fearfully turned their heads in the direction of the noise, only to see Siesta in a very dark mood gripping branches in her hand.

"Wh-what! You are awake already!"

"Oh yes. Thanks to a certain someone and someone of some action, I woke up just now." Siesta smiled while saying so, bearing a frown on her head and mercilessly broke the dead branches in her hand into two clean parts.

"Wha-what are you trying to do!"

"Oh nothing, just making a bonfire as well as some tea..."

Siesta coughed slightly and stood up. To complete the fabricated story, she also patted the dead leaves off her skirt. Just as Saito and Louise were both standing there awkwardly, Siesta took something out from her basket.

"Did the two of you know, that if you add a little bit of lemon with tea, it would taste great?" In the hands of Siesta, was none other than that yellow fruit.

"Ho, ho..."

Although uncertain where she heard about it, it is obvious that she is insinuating to the "lemon-chan" event a while ago.

What's with this maid. How dare you look down on me! Louise trembled with rage.

"Oh wait, I can't do this." Siesta suddenly covered her mouth acting astonished.

"C-can't do what?"

"Wouldn't this be eating your own kind.... or in this case, drinking your own

kind?"

"Just eat already!" Louise snorted angrily and walked up to Siesta with a quick pace, snatched the lemon out of her hands and stuffed it in Siesta's mouth.

Siesta calmly took the lemon out of her mouth and sliced the lemon into thin slices, then threw all the slices into Louise's face.

What used to be a peaceful atmosphere where the both of them were smiling, in no time turned into the stalemate silent war that always wages between the two of them. Saito sat helplessly and watched the two.

With their skirts fluttering in the wind, Saito was indulging in how beautifully this scene is set up. Upon realizing Saito's stares, the two immediately stood up yelling something like "Where are you looking at," "Whose fault do you think it is," and "Which one of us are you going to choose," all while hitting and kicking Saito.

Then Louise started glaring at Siesta with a proud face as if she had won, saying, "The conclusion is obvious isn't it." Neither did Siesta back down and retaliated with a "Huh, it's still too early for an outcome"

Of course, while they were glaring at each other, neither of them stopped their almost repetitive hitting and kicking of Saito. Saito in some degree gave up as well, thinking, *well, I'm fine as long as they don't go any further than this,* and quietly received all the blows. *Whether if it's Siesta or Louise, they're both gorgeous beautiful girls. I guess this is a suitable payment in return for living with both of them together.*

And so..., as the night drew upon them, due to Louise spending too much energy in the daytime, she went to bed at a rather early hour. As usual, there was only one bed. The given reason was that there weren't enough savings, but in reality Louise just wanted to sleep with Saito.

When buying that bed, Louise would often also comment how buying two beds would have been expensive..., how buying two beds is unlucky..., all sorts of reasons.

Yet contrary to all the excuses she gave, she bought Siesta a proper bed all for her. Of course, this made Siesta very unhappy. If she objected, Louise would

then say, "I would feel very bad if we didn't prepare a bed for you after tiring yourself out all day long," and similar things.

Therefore, Siesta would also sneak into their bedroom in the middle of the night and sleep next to Saito.

And of course, Louise would blow up when she wakes up in the morning, and yell something like, "Didn't I properly give you a bed all for yourself?!" And Siesta would reply something like, "Oh, the bed's too uncomfortable," or, "this house looks haunted it's so scary at night!" and so on.

"What do you mean this house looks haunted," Louise questioned one day with big stern interrogating eyes.

Siesta looked away, "Sigh-, how should I put it, it's kinda white, and light, floating in midair, you know. It's really terrifying...."

"Stop lying!"

"Then, how about you sleep at my place once for a change and confirm it for yourself? But wait, Miss Valliere is probably not going to come since you're afraid of ghosts."

"Fine, I'll do it." Louise replied with gritted teeth glaring at Siesta.

And on that night, Louise actually decided to go to Siesta's room, planning to finish off Siesta once in for all if the specter didn't appear. She thought of bringing Saito with her, but she definitely didn't expect "If there're more than one person in the room, the ghost won't come out" said Siesta.

Without a choice, Louise could only sleep alone that night. *It's only a stupid lie after all. Huh. About time I should give Saito a lesson too, I'll go over and yell at him," just as she thought so and prepared to leave....*

A white object floated into the room, causing Louise to immediately jump since she didn't expect it would actually appear at all, and cried out of fear, "Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!"

Just as she was about to faint, Louise's huge scream caused the white object to retreat a few steps in fear too before falling on the floor itself, revealing its real

body. Turns out it was nothing more than Siesta with a bed sheet over her head.

"You, you..."

"Sheesh, you sc-scared me too"

Entering into a storm of fury, Louise ran after Siesta and used her magic without thinking, which ended up hitting Siesta's bed directly.

And so, Siesta's bed disintegrated and from that night onward, Siesta could then proudly come into their room every night carrying her pillow. Although Louise later begged Saito, "Please, please buy a new one."

"You'll only break it again so no." Saito refused without even looking at her.

In the end, Saito, Louise and Seista, just like how they were back at the Magical Academy, slept together in the same bed.

Although it's the usual noisy and arguing days, to Saito this didn't seem so bad to him. Regardless, they are still living in peace. Sure, there may be a war waging between the two women in this house, but it's not like anyone would actually get hurt. Besides, Louise and Siesta both seemed to have their bottom line. Unless the other have really pushed their limits and crossed the line, they'd just let it be, as shown apparently from how they didn't complain in the end about sleeping together in the same bed.

And so, Siesta, Louise and Saito the three of them...., no, there's also Grandma Helen, all four of them was just somehow managed to fit together. Unfortunately all peaceful days have an end...

Only one week after entering summer holiday, they were immediately visited by a guest already.

After going out for a walk like usual, they saw a rather nervous Helen standing in front of the gates.

"Helen, what's the matter?" asked Saito.

"Master, this is bad, there's going to be trouble." Grandma Helen's kind round face was full of anxiety and worries, and said so while running towards the

group. "There's a visitor, but, but, but it's a frightening young lady.... She looks like she's the wife of someone famous, but she's really frightening! She glared at me in front of my face with this, this frown on her head! Glared without blinking!"

"A frightening young lady?" Louise asked.

"Mhm. She looks somewhat similar to Miss Louise."

"...What color is her hair?"

"It's a beautiful blonde."

Saito and Louise looked at eached other. It was Eléonore!

"Helen, that lady is still single. Even if you're joking, don't even say 'she looks like the wife of someone famous,' or that kind. You'll have your ear cut off otherwise."

Hearing so, Grandma Helen immediately drew a cross on herself with shaking hands.

In the guest room on the ground floor, Eléonore was waiting for all of them to come back.

After Louise entered, Eléonore stood up slowly and twisted Louise's cheek with surprising power.

"You little! You Louise!"

"Oww~~"

"Doing everything yourself again! I already know everything! Ma-m-m-m-mar, cough cough..." Eléonore seemed to be unable to say the word in one go.

"Water, hurry..."

Siesta hurriedly poured a glass of water for Eléonore. After emptying the whole glass, she continued, "Marriage, you living with a man before marriage! What in the world are you thinking! Haven't you had enough fun going to the war already, and now you're thinking of living with a man? You will NOT get my permission at all!"

After being pointed out by Eléonore like so, Louise immediately refuted "Wh-wh-wha... we're not living together! Look, it's only a familiar and master.... it's more like we don't have a choice but to live together..."

"This won't do. The other people in the world won't see it this way. La Valliere's third daughter is living with some unidentified man, if such news were to be spread out, we'd be laughed at by the entire country!"

"But, but..."

Eléonore's face turned to a serious tone.

"...Louise. You, didn't you get the legendary power?"

Louise nodded lightly. She had told her family about this some time ago.

"That's right, which is why Father said to me 'walk on the path you believe is right'. You were there, weren't you?"

"But that doesn't mean you can do whatever you want too. You, have obtained greater power than your talents."

"I understand."

"You *don't* understand. Your power is not achieved by you alone. This power is great enough to decide the fate of our mother country. Be more self-respectful, Louise."

"But.... it doesn't matter. This won't cause anything disastrous."

"What makes you say so?"

Louise took a peek at Saito. *Well, isn't this good*- Saito gave her a nod indicating so. Now that they have crushed Romalia's ambitions, there's no need to hide anymore. Besides, Eléonore is none other than Louise's sister.

So, Louise told Eléonore everything that happened between Romalia and Gallia a while ago. "...And because of that, the revival of the void is now impossible... Romalia is incapable of conducting a crusade anymore. Although it won't change the fact that my power is great...., in other words, I don't think it's necessary to be as self-respectful as you say." Then Louise continued, "Even if it were as you said, if I needed to protect my powers, Saito is indispensable. There can't be another person better than Saito to protect me."

Saito nodded his head emotionally. Not being persuaded at all, Eléonore finally broke out and yelled at Louise.

"Don't give me nonsense!"

"No! You're the one spouting nonsense! What, it doesn't really matter whatever happens to the legendary power at all, does it? It's all because what I'm doing now and my status now that's annoying you isn't it? I won't be the same tiny Louise forever!"

Hearing Louise say so, Eléonore's eyelashes started to pulse. Perhaps it is like what Louise said that all the things about the legendary power are nothing more than excuses. She was just hurt that the once small Louise that has been growing up under her watchful eye had not discussed about her future with her at all.

Still unwilling to give up, Eléonore started to even pull on Louise's neck.

"Then, you explain the same thing to Father and Mother and see what they think. Okay, we should go now Miss La Valliere."

Saito instinctively stood in her way. "H-hey! Sister!"

"What. I have no reason to be called sister by you, do I?"

Stared at Eléonore with the cold piercing eyes of hers, Saito couldn't help but shudder. In this overwhelming atmosphere, he could even feel his heart thump against his ribs.

"Just because you helped out in the war, don't think so highly of yourself, much less trying to steal my sister from me. I will **not** let you have your way!"

"W-which is why! I was thinking recently that we might come along and visit...."

"Visit!? You? Visit? What business would you have? Do-don't tell me, you're planning to p-p-p-propose marriage!"

"N-no..., that's..."

"You think some flea like you will be able to get the hands of our dearest La Valliere!? I will definitely NOT agree!"

"W-wait!" Louise interrupted.

"Sister! Saito isn't some flea! He's now her highness's close guard's co-captain, and he even has his own territory! Now he is even a fully accredited aristocrat.... Hurry Saito! Name your rank!"

Saito put on a solemn pose, puffed out his chest and declared "My name, is Saito Chevalier De Hiraga De Ornielle, Sis."

"Not even a duke, you're nothing but a aristocrat of a peasant's background, stop trying to play cool. I'll keep it short! I don't care whether or not you're some legendary hero, La Valliere's dearest daughter will NOT marry some random noble that jumped out of nowhere."

"Then..., what kind of background will a noble need to have for you to be satisfied?"

"Huh? What are you talking about?"

"I, Saito, will definitely become a suitable noble as you see fit!"

"A suitable noble?"

Louise nodded. Eléonore also turned towards Saito. From whichever angle, he looked nothing more than a teenager from a foreign country. As a noble, there were rules and etiquette that were completely different to that of a commoner. This natural talent was the most important proof of a noble status.

As a child of a family of a high status like Eléonore, one glance was enough to determine whether her target was a real or a fake.

But..., once Louise is determined to do something, there was no way to restrain her from doing so. *This child is really like me....* Eléonore quietly whispered to herself.

"I understand. By the time I arrive next time, you better have taught him everything a noble needs to have. If I am not satisfied in even as much as a single flaw, Louise, you're coming home with me at once!"

"Understood!"

Eléonore snorted and rushed out of the door without greeting any one of them goodbye.

"Left a bad impression...." Saito muttered to himself sheepishly before turning around to Louise. "Say Louise, just now, about teaching me to become a proper noble...." Saito began only to find Louise holding a whip while growling with a low voice, flicking the whip god-knows-when-she-had-taken-out on the bed.

"Wha-what are you planning to do!"

"'Miss Valliere. Would you be so kind to instruct me the methods of a noble?' you mean?"

"Eh? Eh? A-are we beginning already?"

"Shut up! By the time Eléonore returns, I will have turned you from the inside out to an impeccable noble!"

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Chapter 7 - Eléonore's Academy

In the western suburbs of Tristainia, there was a tower collectively called the Insitution of Magic. Just as the name literally means, there were various kinds of magic research conducted in that place.

However, compared to practical research, the effects of pure magic were explored a little more.

For example, what kind of flame shapes were similar to what Founder Brimir used, how much wind should be used to blow out the decorative candle flames after festivals, conducting research on earthen materials for the purpose of making sacred grails and so on. Using fire magic to illuminate the streets; using wind magic to transport large quantities of goods; such research to use magic in normal daily life was considered quite vulgar and too lowly.

For the most part, in order to gain more understanding of God, they tried to figure out how to defend their ideals, and would not step out of the theology norm. If someone’s research slightly deviated from the boundary, they would immediately be fastened to a “heretic” label, and in turn be banished or have their research suspended.

There were thirty members in the institution’s magical research team, Eleonore being one of the primary researchers. She specialized in the earth element, her research devoted on how to create beautiful religious statues.

In the evening, after just returning from Des Ornières, Eleonore entered her laboratory located at the fourth floor of the tower, and rested her chin on a table letting out a sigh.

More or less her younger sister’s room too, this place felt it lacked livelihood. The shelves leaning against the wall with clothes spread out on it had all kinds of pots made from clay agents, between the shelves were portraits of deceased ancestors----these were the only decent decorations.

A knock on the door was heard, Eleonore lifted her head, “Please come in.”

The door opened, a young lady came in with her fine black hair coiled into a loose bun and wearing glasses, her hands holding a parchment. It was a colleague, **Bailey** ().

Current age twenty six, she was a primary researcher like Eleonore, using the water element to research magical substances.

Bailey saw Eleonore in this manner.

“Huh, you must be in a sour mood.”

“Little sister . . . ugh, complaining to you is also pointless.”

“Your little sister? Aren’t there rumors that she became an officer of Her Majesty? Being part of the parterre knights should make you very excited. That . . . what else was it that happened? The chevalier who was born a commoner and is always guarding her, they’re living together now, right?”

“That’s right, she wants to live with that peasant animal. I must persuade her to come back home now.”

“Ah! Do you want to get married?”

Upon hearing “married," Eleonore reacted in a flash, scurried like sparks from a flint, and clutched Bailey’s throat.

“Don’t casually say in front of me something that makes me grieve!”

“S--sorry . . . I messed up . . . spare me . . .”

“Say, ‘Marriage is the tomb of life.’”

“Ma--marriage is the tomb of life . . .”

“Very good.”

Eleonore released Bailey at last, and still having the sour expression from before, she sat on a chair. Bailey was gasping, taking big gulps of air, and afterwards resuming her spirit, said,

“Well, well . . . living with this kind of woman who is not in harmony with her research and life, nothing can be done about her staying away from marriage.”

“It’s not my fault my marriage was cut short. What are you trying to get from me?”

Hearing what she asked, Bailey lowered her voice a bit and said:

“Actually, there is something I want to discuss with you.”

“Discuss?”

“Yeah. This is my latest research I’ve carried out according to the orders of the council . . .”

This was the scheme that the council, called “Academy”, had resolved to do. Among the researchers, the best members were selected to take care of the “Academy’s” operation.

Eleonore skimmed the parchment once all the way through, then puckered her brows.

“What do you figure this as?”

“It is very strange. They go as far as to request me to compromise and alter my body with the drug that can increase the strength of magic . . .”

“Is this not heresy? Magic is God’s great undertaking; relying on drugs to strengthen magic and such . . . doesn’t this bother God?”

Eleonore, knitting the brows of her face, said. Bailey nodded in agreement.

“I thought this as well, so I went to ask the council. But they simply said invariably, ‘The purpose of this study is to come closer to God.’”

“Did you do it?”

Elenore watched Bailey attentively.

Although she would like to believe that a substance to strengthen magic power would never exist . . . but Bailey could use square level water magic, in this

aspect almost no one in the whole country could be up to par to her.

Well acquainted with secret medicines, proficient with healing----Eleonore couldn’t say for sure that it’s not impossible.

Bailey nodded.

“In fact . . . a short time ago someone already tried once. He was described as young and frivolous.”

“So! You were saying . . .”

“Um. At first I made something. However, when I was told that what I did was heresy, I promptly stopped the research. Also, the drug does not perform well.”

“What do you mean?”

“Even though it can indeed increase magic power . . . you know, isn’t magic controlled by emotions?”

Eleonore nodded her head.

“It is intensified by emotions. Anger, joy, sadness . . . these feelings can strengthen magic to a point where normal spiritual ability can not reach to that extent.”

“Almost gone mad,” Bailey muttered in a low voice, mocking herself.

It seemed as if she experimented on her own body before.

“Due to various reasons the drug was shelved. Recently, however, I received the letter with orders to take part in compromising and to start again . . . what ultimately caused the interest in this kind of experiment?”

“Possibly the council changed their operation policy. But granted that’s the case, it’s also unlikely it was changed much because there’s no hint of any rumors . . .”

There was no news of a council member changing it. Until now, what was the reason for the project that was viewed as blasphemy to restart?

“Don’t you also think this is weird?”

“Yes.”

“If you can remember anything, you must let me know.”

“I understand. In brief, if you will still pay close attention for such, be careful of everything . . .”

Bailey looked like she relaxed a bit, and after saying thanks, she left the laboratory.

Why did the research start again if it is regarded as heresy?

The lone Eleonore thought as she was caught up in gazing out the window. From here she could somewhat see the distant streets of Tristainia . . . and also the even farther palace. Obviously the landscape didn’t change much, but now it gave a different feeling to her. Was it related to having heard those words?

Well, perhaps it was nothing to be concerned about.

The research policy of the Academy was within theological contexts . . . occasionally there were curious and sudden events that take the upper hand, which the majority of them must not have benevolent results----Eleonore remembered back to some of those kinds of research. **(!)**

If it is possible that this next one is different from those sudden events, then there was no need to be anxious . . . **(!)**

However, her restless mind was difficult to calm down.

She had a premonition that something bad was going to happen, and her body was shuddering slightly.

A seat with a special view called the “box” was located at the innermost second story of the Royal Tanaijiiru theater. Somewhat longer horizontally, up to ten seats were spread out side by side. Only a few important nobles loyal to the country could sit in the box.

Along with the start of the play, the nobles entered one by one wearing masks,

greeted each other without mixing each other up, and settled onto their respective seats. The play that already began, the same one having been shown some time ago, was called "Albion’s Swordsman."

Watching on stage the swordsman cutting down noble generals one by one, the noble sitting farthest to the right spoke his thoughts in a whisper,

“The opera yesterday also bored me to bits.”

The enchanted mask passed his words to the ears of the other noblemen. Having heard this, a noble “comrade” sitting on the far left stated,

“This absurd military drama goes so far as to being played in the time-honored Tanaijiiru . . . it can truly be said that this never gets old for people.”

The noble on the right started to talk again,

“Not only is the opera absurd. The decisions of the Majesty lately . . . not only did she promote a lowly parvenu guard that’s always around her, I heard she even bestowed him with territory.”

“I really cherish the time of the former kings, the age where nobles acted like nobles . . . When everyone knew their place, and importance was attached to etiquette . . . Such good times! But commoners these days are beginning to get arrogant.”

“So true, it seems like if we don’t do everything to support this country, I fear its foundations will waver.”

The ten, whose status is no way beneath nobility, continued to blame the ones who held power in the government.

“For this reason, I only invited high ranking officials to discuss together.”

Behind the seated nobles came the voice of a senior man.

The nobles simultaneously turned their heads around. A tall nobleman walked out from a gap in the curtains, and wearing a pitch black cloak, had a naturally elegant demeanor.

Next to him was a beautiful woman dressed in fine clothes. Both of them wore similar masks.

Someone almost breathed out his name, the tall nobleman put his finger on his lips to signal ‘stop.’

“Like the letter said, here, you need to use *that* name to address me, I will not say **Edmont’s** () real name either . . .”

“Sorry, **Gray-sama** ().”

Satisfied, the noble called Gray-sama shook his head.

“Eh. I’ve invited everyone to gather here because everyone here has a high reputation, important people of the grand Halkeginian kingdom from the times of old, guardians of the traditional wisdom. In order to speak to you all, I was to be so bold as to write down the letter.”

A noble waved his hand to indicate Gray to skip the introduction.

“Nowadays . . . the condition of our ancestral land is simply unbearable to look at. During this time of the young Majesty, she has an urge to destroy everything, and has the intention to undermine the traditions that have so far been around this country for years, furthermore this system has honor.”

The aristocrats all nodded their heads at the same time.

“Like that high ranking official that the Majesty depends on for advice.”

Seeing Gray-sama shaking his head, everyone immediately became tense.

----*Could it be that we can rebel? Before, Gallia’s coup d'état changed the owner of the throne . . . What if Gray-sama received inspiration from that, and wants to exterminate Henrietta?*

A noble said in a serious voice:

“Gray-sama, your speech is as vague and ambiguous as your name. Don’t tell me that you want to use us to start an armed rebellion? Your felony would be difficult to escape from!”

Gray-sama shook his head again.

“Then I ask you all, who can we trust to safeguard our honor as nobles?”

Such an obvious problem caused the nobles to look at each other in dismay.

Gray-sama did not wait for an answer, and continued:

“It’s the Majesty. The ruler of this country ensures our honor, without the Majesty we don’t exist, there’s no need to doubt this fact.”

Everyone relaxed, their bodies that were stretched taut loosened.

“Therefore, the honor of the Majesty is most important. We all shine under her glory . . . so in other words, the Majesty’s honor cannot tolerate a trace of filth, because that filth covers our brilliance with a dark cloud.”

The nobles present here were finally aware of what he wanted to speak about.

“Gray-sama. What you’re saying . . .”

“That’s right, on the behalf of the Majesty we must eliminate the filthy! For the purpose of keeping this country’s traditions, this is the time we, as older nobles, display our utmost loyalty.”

“The so called uncleanliness is . . .?”

“Does everyone understand? Those lowly peasants,”

Gray-sama said, while watching the performance. He simply didn’t have any other opinion. The captain of the Firearm Guards, Agnes, was born as an ordinary citizen . . . although the young woman was capable, among the city residents, she had no popularity. Although, her patrolling with cold and solemn expressions and having the appearance of working with all her efforts have been widely known among people in Tristainia.

She had less reputation compared to Saito, whose popularity could be said to have skyrocketed to the extent that the drama playing out in front of them was made. For the nobles of Tristain, their interpretation no doubt is like having a fish bone wedged in their throat. Although it’s not so bad as to be life

threatening, but it is an incredible insult, and from time to time stabs at a noble's ego. Making him disappear would only be the best.

All the persons present thought like this.

"So . . . who can get rid of that dragon man? At Albion, he hindered an army of seventy thousand, defeated ten of the noble Flowerbed Knight Guards at the sandbank, and rumor has it that his skill is supernatural. A careless hit-man will be stopped by him."

"I already know, so I hired top-class cleaning experts."

"Cleaning experts?"

"Yes, some guys specialized in 'eating this kind of food.' Talk:Zero no Tsukaima:Volume16 Chapter7 - MTL#1 They're professional level, thus their asking price is quite high. Basically, I would like to ask everyone to help with funds."

"If you're employing assassins, then we shall have to see how good of their skills!"

"Yes, that's right," the other nobles parroted. If strangers were hired and caused their plan to fail, the money would be squandered. Not only that, but their employers could be exposed, and then all chaos would be set loose.

"Since you say so, I will personally look them over,"

Gray-sama said, full of confidence.

"In here?"

"No . . . in another place."

The nobles got up and stood. Behind the door and across from it was a wide stairwell which lead to the first floor, where specially recruited knights were stationed. After all, they were renowned and greatly respected nobles, and even in a secretive meeting they could not neglect to take precautions. Thirty knights should have been on guard over there . . .

When the door was opened, the nobles gasped, shocked. Their own knights that they brought, among them not one remained. Some collapsed on the dance floor, some fell onto the stairs, and on the luxurious carved railing, some knights were leaning against them.

“How did this happen?!”

One noble connected the situation but didn’t have enough time to consider things when there was a sudden great shout. Naturally they were surprised, each of those knights were skilled, of which they obtained outstanding achievements in competitions that took place in the presence of noblemen, they all have experienced the baptism of the battlefield, and they’ve fought countless duels under the fiercest existing general.

“No need to worry, they are not dead. They only lost consciousness.”

“Did you do this?!”

A noble questioned forcefully to Gray-sama.

“You said correctly, it was me who actually hired them.”

So they are . . . the actual cleaning experts which Gray-sama spoke about! In a brief period of time they dispatched thirty knights, moreover, no one inside the adjacent room that was connected to here detected it in the slightest bit, such extraordinary finesse. However, this skillfulness was not fit to be seen by light. The elder nobles analyzed the scene of fallen knights lying on the floor, and sniffed the faint scent of darkness. Freely wandering in the profound darkness, was a nocturnal creature that no one has seen. The nobles imagined what its attitude would be like, and they trembled endlessly.

“As you can honestly see, they don’t fight with honor by their side at all, so to use them to handle that upstart commoner is definitely the best choice.”

“What Gray-sama said is very right,”

A noble stated. By now . . . the play had finished, the door that lead to the first level seats had opened, and the audience members were bubbling into the lobby hall like a swarm of bees.

They noticed lying on the stairs the unconscious knights and screamed blood-curdling screeches. However, Gray-sama was at ease and said calmly:

“Calm down, have peace. I saw all of “Albion’s Swordsman” and afterwards felt unusually touched, hence I am trying to recreate a scene in the play. So, let these knights play out their performance.”

The audience, amazed, changed into smiling faces, and bursting into laughter, they clapped their hands.

“Wow, Mister-sama set it up so beautifully!”

“It really is a masterpiece!”

Enjoying the finished play, the citizens were considerably excited, and it appeared that this entertaining sideshow greatly satisfied them. There was continuous praise toward Gray-sama who was upstairs.

Seeing those kinds of city residents, one person among the elderly nobles whispered quietly,

“Untouchable lowlifes! Don’t be too pleased with yourself!”

“Don't be so serious, this is a theater, a place where everyone comes to seek a dream. To grant people a temporary dream could be said to be a nobleman’s responsibility. But, nobles overthrown by commoners and such, merely taking place on the stage is enough. This is what I think.”

When he was done speaking, Gray-sama turned towards the spectators downstairs and gracefully performed a bow.

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Chapter 8: The Basement of the Residence

Louise was about to make Saito into a ‘gorgeous aristocrat’, and her interest in his education burned more intensely. Initially, Saito was under the impression that he would be under strict etiquette disciplining involving suffering and was shaking from head to toe, but things were not so simple.

On the whole, during meal time there was only one etiquette that must be followed: wipe the mouth before drinking wine.

In addition, so long as using silverware, no one should be making a sound, so he can’t chatter about things with Louise.

What gave Saito a headache was the social etiquette. Take for example banquet etiquette, it seemed like there’s a certain way to invite someone to dance, and one had to be very careful when taking leave . . . this meaningless conduct demonstrated the nature of nobles. However, in the end, Saito came from a Japanese born on Earth, and at the time period he was born in was when it wasn’t common for people to act as such. They did not have such manners.

So he often suffered which is why he wanted to get out, *Give me a good reason to leave*, raising his hands as a gesture was not enough for this lesson, Saito could not bear it anymore. If it is like this, perhaps by meal time the ‘no good’ lesson could be a little bit better. Louise’s education was already integrated into his life . . . training started from the moment he got up in the morning from bed and continued until night time when he went back to bed until it got to the point where he stopped putting the lessons into practice . . .

However, even so, starting this time; Saito had better try harder, Louise thought . . . To please Eleonore, she tried hard to change his behaviour to be more refined. But in this world what seemed to be an impossible issue existed. Being born

without something, even no matter what is done, it can not be imposed on. Among the things that are achievable and things that aren't exists a clear boundary, and Saito is the type of person who is unable to overcome that one boundary in any way.

"Hey, when it comes to this, can you understand anything? You act like a cow simply eating grass and not tasting any of it!

Special training would start five days later . . . when he was told this, Saito finally exploded.

"There's no way to do this! What you say is like asking a chicken to fly! You are forcing me to do something I can't, even if you say it's simple, it's impossible to understand, I don't have any basic foundation to refer from. Even if you plan to continue, just make the bothersome lessons simpler!"

"Don't tell me that what I teach you isn't simple already! Watch, just like so, bow!"

While saying this, Louise easily and fluently bowed in front of Saito. Even dancing could not match the gracefulness, the precise movements combined with accuracy resulted in the perfect curtsy. If one only fancied to take a look, one apparently can experience the essence of the aristocratic history of Halkeginia.

By demand, Saito followed and also did one curtsy. However, although he himself thought there was basically no difference between his and Louise's, the teacher did not think the same way.

"No! Everything was not good! This will be absolutely impossible to get approval from Eleonore onee-san!"

"I said . . ." Saito paused at once, afterwards the emotions that he had restrained and accumulated towards Louise for the past several days all came out.

"Who was the one that wanted to live with me? Eleonore onee-san? She is not you! Is this what you think about all the time? Could it be that you hope I will be like this? Hope that I will pose and ask, 'How do you do, ma'am?' saying children's lines?"

"Not like that, not like that."

“If that’s the case, let me stay the way I am, alright? This stuff can come in handy. I can observe manners, and keep up a demeanor of a gentleman. However, to change the behaviour I was already born with is quite strange.”

Louise, with a dissatisfied look, bit her lips.

She did not expect to allow her lover to act in this way . . . this man will become her husband in the future, she will be looked down upon by her family.

As a result, she fiercely resolved in her heart to carry out her special training, but Saito did not pay attention to it.

“I won’t permit you to be only looked down upon by my family.”

However when Louise said it like that, Saito instead became more angry. He made a ‘why must I be with her’ kind of sound.

“If it’s only my behaviour that will be looked down upon, I have nothing to say. If you’re a so-called noble, your stubbornness would be enough. I don’t need to be with you because I don’t come from a noble background!”

“You don’t understand at all!”

“Who doesn’t understand!”

“So you don’t expect to live together with me?”

“I never said that! But if I have to do everything *you* want in order to live together, then that’s not going to work.”

“If you plan to live with me, then it is good to be a noble! If you don’t want it like this, then the partner I danced with at the ball sure fooled me!”

When she said that, Saito felt like a hammer heavily pounded and attacked his heart. “What . . . so you care more than I do about what other people see of you?”

Seeing the two people like this, Siesta had a helpless look on her face. It seemed like the rest of the servants like Helen have already chosen to flee as the best strategy.

In conclusion, Louise didn’t say anything again, she simply stood up and ran away trying to contain her tears. Even though Saito chased after her, Louise was a step ahead and bursted into her bedroom and locked the door.

Showing a tired expression on his face, Saito returned to the dining hall and then sat down into a chair. Siesta stood showing a nervous expression on her face.

A disharmonious atmosphere circulated around the place.

“Siesta . . . what do you think?”

“To be honest, I think what Saito-san said is reasonable.”

“And?”

“But I also understand what Valliere-sama feels.”

Even with this much said, to do what Louise actually said, to turn ‘noble’ manners into habits anyhow would be awfully difficult. Maybe if he had one year and concentrated on the training, it would be a possibility. However, Saito still had work, it would be impossible to complete it all with the time he had.

“For this matter you might entirely not care about my words but . . . nobles have various sorts of troubles.”

“Really, eh? If I had known earlier that this issue would become so bothersome . . .”

“‘Become,’ you said?”

“Not becoming some noble precisely because it’s hard to act like a noble, this dog here sure complains a lot.”

“Well!” Siesta’s eyes opened round.

“What is it?”

“Don’t use that careless tone of voice to speak about this situation that you don’t know of its importance. From a commoner to a familiar . . . and after that you now are a noble. Don’t tell me that you didn’t rise straight up to a clear sky, got

promoted so fast?”

“Rising up to a clear sky? I, that’s just the way it is . . . as long as I get along with everyone it’s all good. I don’t want to wear fancy clothes while attending parties and issue lousy and long greetings flattering each other.”

Saito became agitated as he spoke. Louise was half crying when she ran into her room . . . in this way the heavy atmosphere became even heavier, and Siesta did not withdraw, but persevered, went to the kitchen and brought back a bottle of grape wine.

“Here----drink some now. This is most important.”

Siesta held a glass and poured wine in it, then Saito drained the cup in one shot.

“In a single day life became peaceful, yet this kind of peace brought about a bunch of inconveniences . . .” Saito came to trance and talked to himself.

Siesta heard him and nodded her head: “So it’s like that. Although war is no good, but everyone knows clearly who the enemy is. Peace sometimes becomes troublesome. After all, who is a foe, who is a friend, there’s no way to be happy when you realize that.”

Saito admired Siesta and looked at her eyes: “You said something truly mature.”

“It is from Mother, who studied all that she could,” Siesta said in a way that appeared to be bashful.

“What’s more . . . in a relaxing time like this, the eyes and ears naturally become keen. Up until now the little subtleties were not really noticed in this place . . . For example, during mealtime the sounds that are made, the way the door opens and closes . . .

“These tiny details can make it hard to show restraint. I was in a dormitory in a maid school at the time when something like that happened. I just entered the dormitory and being too nervous, I didn’t care about almost everything . . . but after I was settled, the girl who shared my dormitory made noise by grinding her teeth, and the method used to wash stuff, they all caused me to feel very unhappy.”

“So that’s how it was before.”

“Anyway, if it’s for Saito-san, I can actually be patient.”

Siesta smiled sweetly and leaned against Saito’s body. Seeing his bewildered appearance, Siesta got off and released the next wave of attack.

“Ah!”

“Wha--what! What is it?!”

Siesta looked confused and put her hands on her chest. “Bug, bug . . .”

“Bug?”

“A . . . bug got into my shirt. Please help me take it out.”

“Wh--why me?!”

“Because . . . I’m terrified of insects . . .” As she was speaking, Siesta shyly undid the first button of her blouse. Even so, Saito did not move. Thus, the second button was also undone.

“ . . . ”

“Eh!” Making this sound invited Saito to gaze up, and also took out the third button, yet indeed Saito still did not move.

“I don’t dare to grasp.”

Siesta yawned ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ and in a high pitched sigh, said: “Could it be that I am not charming? . . . Normally in these circumstances, not even if you knew there was no bug, would you put your hand in?”

“It’s not like that . . .” Saito bitterly muttered.

“I know. It’s because you already have Valliere-sama. Huh, Saito-san is really good. However, please thank me, because the last battle was not serious.”

“ . . . Battle? Serious?”

Siesta glared with ice-cold eyes. Then, she lightly whispered into the side of Saito’s ear.

Although it’s not like Saito to vainly attempt to exaggerate, but if it’s from what Siesta said with her fresh and pure lips, she possessed matchless power. Even if he immediately covered his nose, one could still see what flowed out from within.

“What are you ultimately thinking about . . .”

“This is what the same girl in the school dormitory taught me! Although I’m starting to think this is unlikely. But!”

Her whole face blushing, Siesta stood up. Silence drifted between the two of them. Next, Siesta appeared to have set her determination and in a tone that inhaled air, then she lifted her skirt to cover her mouth and spoke in a low voice, “But do you want to try a little?”

He really wanted to peek. However, Saito nevertheless forcibly suppressed his desire. He clutched his thigh and thought back to an angry Louise.

Siesta not long after gave up, then took the wine, *splash, splash,* and poured some into her own cup.

After some time, both people were openly drinking wine. Siesta laid her stomach on the table and began to fall asleep. Saito went to a room to get blankets to cover her.

He was thinking about how it was time to cool down and checked out Louise's room, but the door was still locked like before.

Waiting for his head to gradually calm down, Saito started to ponder: *Just now it seems like I was a bit impatient.* Then he also thought, *Since she already decided to live with me, compared to the household I came from, she attaches more importance to her own ideas,* and so on. Saito previously wished Louise had answered Eleonore like this: “Even if he is already successful, Saito is still Saito! I’ve decided to live with this man! There’s no need to put on the appearance of a noble, isn’t that so?”

Of course, Louise never said anything like that, but rather, “Let me change him into a gorgeous aristocrat!” Furthermore, if Saito’s manners aren’t up to Eleonore’s standards when she is informed, Louise will be sent back to her home.

In short, Saito reached a conclusion.

Which means I cannot be accepted at all . . . From this conclusion his confidence bit by bit withered away and Saito soon thought: Their demand should not have to be by the end of the month. Thought there were some recent changes, but Louise, after all that happened, was still by the side of this man. The development of noble conduct was estimated to have already penetrated deeply into his bones.

Just as he intended to pour more wine, Saito discovered the wine bottle was empty already. “I really wanted to drink some . . .”

Saito carrying a candle headed toward the kitchen. He looked beside the cabinet, but could not locate any wine. The kitchen was managed by Helen-obasan and Siesta, so he was completely clueless as to where anything was. Anyway, because he couldn’t find anything, he instead wished more to drink some more.

While Saito overturned boxes and containers scouring the kitchen, he found something out of his expectations.

“What is this?” He looked through the depths of the cabinets and found an old key.

“Key? Where does this key go?”

At that moment, a location suddenly flashed through Saito’s mind. The very bottom of the stairs that lead to the basement entrance . . . indeed if there was no key inserted no one could go in, right? So far, there was no plan to make use of the basement, so when it was time for renovation that area was ignored. Also wanted to make the cost a little cheaper.

The very old, very round key had faded scratches everywhere.

Saito arrived in front of the door at the bottom of the stairs, slowly took the key, inserted it in the keyhole and turned it. The lock core made a *ka-chink* sound.

“It opened . . .”

With the door opened, Saito saw another staircase leading farther underground. At the end . . . what does the basement actually have? The end of the staircase was encircled by deep darkness. Without thinking he gripped the katana he brought back from the weapon storehouse in Albion. In response to dangerous situations when Saito was unable to carry Derflinger, he often brought this katana and pistol. Although Derflinger complained a little excessively, but because they’re inside a house Saito can’t wave around a huge sword, so there was no other method besides this.

The inscriptions on his left hand glowed, and immediately Saito’s heart felt secure. Soon after he took his hands off the weapon. Because he was Gandalfr,

his time was limited. Of course, he also had timid feelings inside.

This is just a basement.

Although his logic thought in that way, but he was unsure about why he felt frightened. This fear must not be allowed, and Saito, having an interest for wine, was facing the flight of steps and took the first step. *Ghosts are fine, and vampires are fine, they'll give me courage. You will all drop dead when I'm done dealing with you . . .*

The stairs weren't as long as he imagined. In the blink of an eye he reached the basement. From what he saw from the candlelight, the room didn't have anything. Probably beforehand this place was used as a storage room, there were many ruined barrels, planks, what could possibly be props used to fix the courtyard, and such things that were covered in dust.

On the other hand, Saito was thinking about whether there could be some wine, and began searching everywhere.

While he was thinking *This place won't be any good if it's not cleaned . . .* Saito felt a subtle protrusion in the gap of a wall.

"What's this?"

Unaware why, the protrusion seemed like it could be pressed to go to the interior. Before his eyes the wall produced a series of muffled *groaning* and *creaking* sounds and shifted open. It appeared to be magic. Saito watched the places where it combined one after another and nodded his head.

"This is . . . that. The place used to hide secret treasure."

Indeed, this is worthy to be a house for nobles. A customized mechanism built to deposit treasure, it's no mistake.

So it turns out this way. God is really powerful, not only did I receive territory, He also pointed out this buried treasure. What could this treasure really be . . . Saito thought excitedly, and used the candlelight to look inside.

There was a stone reinforcement, one person alone was able to crouch and make his way into a passage.

“The end has a concealed room I think.”

Although he felt uncomfortable and the darkness was pitch-black . . . Saito could not overcome his curiosity and longing, and hunching his back, he took the first step. Forward 10 meters, 20 meters . . . suddenly a door showed up in front of him.

Saito swallowed his saliva . . . and pushed the door open.

“ So this is . . .” This is . . . Saito felt that the room would have tens of piles left and right. “. . . a bedroom?”

An unexpected underground bedroom, what a really weird design. Placed in the center of the room was a bed with an overhang.

Around the room had what looked like wardrobes and other things arranged. Saito found the furniture to be quite beautiful. The bed overhang was decorated with lace, some parts had gems embedded.

“These things are valuable no doubt, but I think it is overall a little strange.”

Exactly who before would live underground? The room looked like it was still in use, like it was never abandoned. However, the basement of the house was in a whacky mess, the extraordinary difference was obvious.

“Or was magic applied . . .?”

Is it because a permanency spell was used to protect the room? That appeared to be the correct answer. Even though the room was not neglected, but Saito could not sense . . . the feeling that anyone lived here.

Displayed on the wall of the bedroom was a huge full-body mirror. Indeed, it was a mirror more or less as tall as Saito. Saito crept slowly towards it. Then . . . for a reason unknown, the mirror started to sparkle with dazzling radiance. The gate that looked like the one he encountered before, and the surroundings were brimming with light.

Basically, this mirror seemed to be an enchanted gateway. ‘What should I do? Go in to see? No . . . isn’t this how I ended up in this world some time ago?’

“Maybe the reverse is true . . .”

Maybe it’s possible to freely come and go through this magic gate, but it can’t be said for sure. Saito, unable to take his eyes off, stared intently at the mirror.

Henrietta was thinking about issues in her bedroom. Just a moment ago, Mazarin and Marian visited to inquire pertaining to her answer in choosing a marriage partner. However, up to now she was pondering over national affairs, not even having a thought about her future. Yet, both these matters were intertwined, which felt like being bound to herself by chain shackles that can’t be broken.

If I consider things at the standpoint of what’s best for the country, then I should do what Mother and the Cardinal suggested. In fact, a year ago didn’t he himself say he intended for the queen to marry at Romalia.

However, she was different now from herself one year ago. She already learned that if she made a decision, she must follow through with that decision completely. Even if it’s a mistake . . .

Well, why do I not wish to get married? I don’t have a designated lover. Could it not be that there’s no problem whatsoever?

Am I already fond of a man? Thinking about that, Henrietta stopped pondering. That . . . is not love at all. That was her conclusion after asking herself.

But.

Only one, if she could permit herself to try willfully.

I wish for him.

She wished to show herself by means of her own willpower to decide on that young guy.

“ . . .What a stubborn lady.”

Henrietta bit her lip and gave up, and then stood because imagining things like that was really too shameful. Originally she wanted to call in a female officer, but suddenly changed her mind. Embracing her desire and foolish idea to be alone, she took off her indoor clothes near the wardrobe. When she opened the drawer, intending to take out her pajamas . . . There came a *thump, thump* beating sound from something heavy. She immediately turned her head, what startled her was that a portion of the wall was actually moving!

“Eh?”

With an astonished look she watched, a portion of the wall, like a rotating door, reversed. When she noticed that inside there seemed to be a person, Henrietta let out a sad cry.

Now coming through the shining gate before Saito’s eyes . . . was a stone wall. Behind the magic gate that was a full-body mirror shining with light, and at the end of it was a ten meter square, the whole thing a stone wall.

“What is this place?”

Not thinking much of it, he extended his hand, *Upon examining this wall in front of me, can it move too?*

After putting more force into pushing the wall, it swiveled around. The next thing that caught Saito’s eye was . . . by candlelight, a woman’s figure.

“Eh?”

At this split second, the woman let out a sad cry.

“Aaaaaaaaaah!”

After the voice stopped, just now he realized that who he saw was a familiar face.

“Princess?”

Henrietta finally took notice of his voice.

“Sai---Saito?”

Saito was excited among the confusion. First, he found the basement of the mansion in the Des Ornières territory, then found a secret passage . . . and just now found another strange room, and finally passed through to the other side of the mirror because of his insatiable curiosity . . .

“Why is Princess here?”

Saito was completely confused. Henrietta stood there with her mouth open, not knowing what to do.

While both people were in a state of confusion, the inside of their ears echoed with Agnes’ bellowing, “Your Majesty! What happened?”

The unlocking sound that Agnes made, *ka-chink ka-chink*, made Henrietta resume her consciousness. She seized Saito’s hand and shoved him onto her bed. If Saito was seen here in the middle of the night, things would become a little troublesome, even for Agnes.

Right when Henrietta covered Saito with a blanket, the door opened and Agnes dashed inside with her sword unsheathed.

“Your Majesty!”

Henrietta pushed Saito on the bed and got on top to obstruct him from view, then acted like nothing had happened.

“Well, I heard Your Majesty moan . . . so I hurried over here,” Agnes explained after seeing Henrietta’s puzzled expression and calm demeanor.

“Sorry for alarming you . . . I just saw a mouse a moment ago, I couldn’t help but call out.” Henrietta used this excuse as a cover up.

“So that’s what it was . . .”

Agnes, having a somewhat blank expression, retreated from the room. Henrietta sighed with relief, and Saito pulled the covers from the bed.

“What exactly happened? At such a late time . . .”

Saito didn’t know anything, and he turned over with a haughty look . . . but from the small light, he realized Henrietta was only wearing underwear, and without delay opened his eyes.

With such thin silk underwear, the fervent figure of Henrietta could be clearly seen.

“Ah . . .”

Blushing across her whole face, Henrietta wrapped herself in the same indoor robes she had just took off.

Chapter 9: Secret meeting

"Oh my....."

Never thinking that the room of the palace was linked to Des Ornières, Saito and Henrietta sat on the bed of the underground room. It seemed that the mirror was a magical object that worked like a secret door, linking this room and the palace far away.

"It's almost like a world door," according to Saito.

"I'm afraid that it's something..... that uses that kind of power."

Something that uses the power of Void..... The date when it was made remains an unknown, but it seems quite majestic. Even though its creator is also an enigma, someone that can condense the power of Void truly existed in this world, passing it on to future mages. That was Brimir that he once dreamt of, right? However, Saito knew nothing regarding this.

On the other hand, because the wall on Henrietta's bedroom did not have this magic, the entrance there remained hidden until now. This was a blind spot; if the skill, Detect Magic, can't find it, then there was no magic present; that was the kind of thinking that had taken root in the mind of the nobles.

"Of course, it should be that! This is a secret escape route, right?" Saito exclaimed. There was a norm in most plays of old..... The rooms of kings and his ministers should have some kind of escape route. That was what Saito thought.

However, Henrietta shook her head.

"I.....don't think it's so. Looking around the structure of this room.....In the past, the land of Des Ornières was the concubine room (E/N: referred to as an oda) of Father's or Grandfather's."

"Concubine room?"

"Yes. Also known as.....even though it really isn't something to be proud of, it refers to lovers."

Lovers.....hearing this made Saito blush.

"If it really was just an escape route, there wouldn't really be a need to build this room, right? Unfortunately, I think.....it's to let the lover live in the rooms above ground and meet secretly with her here in this room."

Looking around the place, it was filled with things coveted by lovers. On the wall with meticulous carvings and decorated with beautiful jewels.....the canopied bed was large and the cloth used were of high quality.

"Father, Grandfather, Great-grandfather.....Even though I don't know who, I don't think I would be wrong. I know of the escape routes of the city, but not of this secret passage. That should means it's down to this."

"....."

"Sorry about that. However, it's strange. Father and Grandfather were once known as strict kings, but they also had such a side to them."

It seems like Henrietta does not feel that her family was impure, but simply felt that they were not the stone cold statues she knew of. After the mystery of the identity of the room was solved, there was not much to it.....but this unexpected result left Saito very nervous.

Naturally.....this being a place where lovers met secretly, but now he was sitting here with Henrietta alone.

Henrietta seemed to notice Saito's inner conflict, so she said with a soothing voice.

"I really didn't know about it. The land given to you being connected to the palace this way."

"I understand. Don't worry about it."

"Then it's settled then. It has been given to you in any case. I was just thinking when I should come over to visit you.....how was the stay here?"

Saito was at a loss of words. He can't really say that he never really stayed here, right? So he just muttered,

"It's not bad. Strolling around here is quite refreshing."

"Is it so? Then that's excellent."

They remained silent for a while.

Saito looked at Henrietta from the corner of his eyes. Henrietta, illuminated by the candlelight seemed to radiate irresistible sweet scent. This was a point that Louise could never match up to. Also.....there was a hint of a valley in the center of the nightgown-like dress.

Thinking back to the Henrietta just now, only wearing her underwear, Saito held his nose.

Not knowing if she took note of Saito's inner conflict, Henrietta continued to talk nonchalantly.

"I always had this.....strange feeling."

"Strange feeling?"

What was the "strange feeling" she was talking about? Maybe it was.....butterflies in her stomach kind of feeling?

"Yes. Even though it is now peacetime, some other troublesome things pop out."

A quiet voice was filled with emotion.

"Yeah."

Saito thought about the fight with Louise just now while answering.

"I was looking forward to a time of peace, knowing that such times are hard to come by.....but there are still many things that trouble me. This is really such irony."

"Trouble?"

Seeing as Saito asked, Henrietta answered.

"To unite the nobles of the country, Mother and Mazarin are asking me to marry."

Quietly, dejectedly, Henrietta spoke her piece. From her voice, Henrietta did not wish for such a marriage. Not knowing what to say, Saito was very disturbed.

"I already gave up hope of marrying the person I loved. However.....facing such a matter again still makes me very depressed."

It seems that someone has already tried to matchmake her, so that she would tie the knot with some powerful noble in the country. To make hay while the sun shines during peacetime, the country's society should be consolidated. Saito finally understood that it was a classic power struggle of the court.

"Do you really want to marry?"

"Hmm.....I still can't make a decision."

Henrietta lifted her head to look at Saito. Her gaze, looking for someone to depend on made Saito stopped breathing.

"Can you decide for me?"

In a sudden, Saito didn't know what she was referring to.

"Decide.....what?"

"Decide the path I should take."

Saito bucked up and looked at Henrietta.

"Meaning, the matter of marrying?"

"Yes."

Slowly, Henrietta nodded.

"Why.....me?"

"I don't really know why, but when I'm troubled, your face will pop out in my mind. In the past, because of the incident of Wales-sama, from the bottom of my heart; I vowed not to love anyone again, but.....how many times have I been saved by you? I now looked to you as my pillar of support, I don't know why, but I keep thinking about you. In my dreams, in the real world, I have only gone through love once, so I don't really know if this feeling is called love. However.....the part about my heart beating wildly, this part is true."

Henrietta lowered her head. It can be seen that her previous words,"I can only let you see the Queen side of me" was not true.

"So that's why you chose me?"

"No, not only that."

Saying this, Henrietta grasped Saito's hands tightly. Even though his hands were just held, Saito's heart beat wildly. Louise, Tiffania, Siesta, Tabitha, Saito witnessed various beautiful girls, but Henrietta's beauty was different from its very core. She was not just beautiful, she has an attractive, irresistible, even devilish aura about her. Also, this irresistible aura can't be found in the majestic palace, but only in this sunless underground room, or even in that cheap inn.

"Don't you feel the same way from me?"

The Henrietta asking now, was not the face of the Queen, but it was that of a normal girl.

Saito's breath almost stopped. Henrietta's words, one by one, were printed onto his heart. Yeah, during that time.....he really tasted Henrietta's beauty, his heart beating wildly.

Saito felt that his heart was beating wildly again, as Henrietta showed a cheerful smile.

"The thing that night was really unforgettable."

She then cheekily watched Saito's reaction from below.

"At that time, you came at my lips like this....."

Henrietta's face closing into his, Saito's body turned stiff. Henrietta gently hugged Saito's shoulders, and slowly joined her lips with his in one elegant swoop.

A long time passed before Henrietta's lips left Saito's. A self-teasing smile surfaced on her face.

"You won't say a word about asking me not to marry, will you?"

"Hmm....."

Saito asked his soul. Something along the lines of not sacrificing oneself for the country might seem easy to speak.....but considering Henrietta's stand, that really seemed willful to do so.

However.....even if she was born to be a queen, should she stand to such a degree?

"This has nothing to do with that."

Saito realised it.

There was not a need for such petty values, what's important was if his inner heart really wished for Henrietta's marriage. Is it really true that I.....Saito shook his head. No, the person he liked was Louise.....

Saito felt extremely conflicted. Henrietta spoke with a hint of remorse.

"Sorry, I didn't want to trouble you with this. Really."

It could be said firmly that Saito's heart was shaken again.

"Discussing this with you was really too willful. You're Louise's lover, but I still seduced you.....I'm still the same as my Father and Grandfather who built this room."

Henrietta lowered her head for a while before showing a lonely smile and standing up.

"I'm really sorry, please forget it....."

"Princess."

Henrietta mumbled as if she wanted to leave everything in her heart behind.

"I guess I'll have to marry. Mulling it over calmly, this really is the best choice. I won't be troubled by anyone anymore."

Saito stood reflexively, holding Henrietta's hand, shouting,

"No! Don't marry!"

"Eh?"

"Just agreeing to marriage without thinking it over is still quite strange. If you don't want it why can't you just refuse it?"

Henrietta suddenly turned serious.

"Are you saying that because you're pitying me? Or....."

Seeing Saito at a loss of words, Henrietta smiled.

"Why are you so troubled over this.....I understand, you're a decent man. If it was someone else, they won't think twice and just commit infidelity. This isn't just to defend you, but I think anyside of you is true. I'm the same. You're the lover of my best friend, I should have forgotten about you long ago. But, there is another me in my heart who doesn't wish so, thinking, *there's nothing to do with that.* But.....I don't think that's strange. Humans, are beings that are naturally conflicted."

"....."

"Thank you. Since you said it, I'll turn down this marriage offer. However, I won't ask you to replace that. Don't worry about it. It's just that, can we meet here, sometimes, like this again? At least I.....No, nothing. Nn, just wanting to be friends. How about it?"

Saito.....slowly nodded.

If it just was being friends, there's nothing wrong about that. However, can they really just be friends?

Saito felt that he was weak. However.....even so, he just can't refuse Henrietta. The dim candlelight or Henrietta's body amplified her charm, stimulating Saito's

primal urges.

Through the door slit, Louise, who watched the couple from beginning to the end, sat on the ground of the underground passage.

"How did it turn out this way?"

Her mind was filled with what she saw just now.

Louise, who had a fight with Saito just now, only started thinking after she returned to her bed. In the end, she reflected on her actions.

Just because she "didn't want Saito to be taken as a fool by her family", she unknowingly treated him sternly. She didn't know how to let Saito know of her true intention, but still stubbornly played around with the thought that "Satio would know even if she didn't say anything." Thinking here, Louise started to regret her actions.

Holding her pride and emotions at bay, Louise jumped down from her bed and ran to the canteen. There was only Siesta, sleeping, blanketed with a towel. Saito was not there.

Starting to worry about Saito, Louise looked high and low throughout the house before noticing the door to the basement ajar. After that.....Louise walked along the passage where Saito had just walked to door of the underground room.

When she saw Saito and Henrietta inside, Lousie's heart almost stopped from fright.

She wanted to call them, but not a sound leaked out.

At first, Louise thought that this was prearranged by Henrietta to meet with Saito secretly.

But it was not so.

From their conversations, it was obvious that the both of them had also just knew of the existence of this room.

But hearing their conversation completely, that was not important at all.

Henrietta once told Louise that, "If there was a need to do so, then she will take the will to do it."

"She was serious about it."

Also.....Saito also seemed interested in Henrietta. After understanding this, Louise wanted to ask Saito and Henrietta about their infidelity, but she couldn't take another step.

Yeah.....it must be just as the Princess said.

The feelings of both sides are true.

Saito's feelings about herself was true, and so was his feelings to Henrietta. If as Henrietta's friend, her feelings were also true, then her feelings for Saito were also true.

Both sides are true.....then there are not any contradictions anymore. They are a perfect match for each other.

When she knew of everything.....her mind blanked out. Louise started to think,

Does she have the right to blame them?

That feeling that stirred inside Louise was not betrayal but a deep sadness.

Just now, wasn't she unable to let Saito know of her true intentions and just got angry?

Saito just kept tolerating her. Just like what Louise said, striving to look elegant. Even so, what did she say to Saito?

"You'll just embarass me like that, you know? How are you going to dance with me during the ball?"

Her inner doubts before coming to this house started to resurface in her mind. Inner doubts that were held down by her pride.

Saito, who has become the country's hero.

Saito, who is more alive than any of the heroes in ancient tales.

"To Saito, am I really made out for him?"

Just like before, Louise sneaked back to her room. Her brain turned slack. Trying to calm down, Louise finished packing her luggage.

Louise, who just witnessed everything, concluded this.

"I'm not made out for him."

Just like that.

To Saito, the hero who just saved the country, and also one who has many enemies, he needs a real protector. Even if she was called "the user of Void", she'd just keep attracting trouble. She would just get in Satio's way.

If it was Henrietta, she will surely complete her grand mission.

Anyhow, she's a queen of this country. If one were to be at her side, normal nobles won't dare to do anything.

But all these are just petty reasons. There is only one true reason.

The most important part is that.....both of them match each other well.

Since things turned out like this, where can she fit in?

Blaming the both of them, crying in front of them, just doesn't feel right. This is because Henrietta can protect Saito better than she could ever do, she will also cherish him more than she ever could. Also, Saito.....

Actually likes Henrietta. He's just enduring it, just because he's worried about me.....

As the blow dealt was too harsh, Louise forgot to ask Saito about his true feelings. For Louise, Saito is much more perfectly matched with Henrietta than with herself. Louise did not notice that her thoughts now were a cause of her Inferiority complex.

Louise just thought like this.

It would be nice if she just disappeared. This way, everyone would be happy and

completely enjoy the hard earned peace.

"Being at my side just makes everybody uncomfortable."

"It's so simple, Louise. If you really think that everybody is important, then you should do it."

Her heart frozen by grief, Louise packed her luggage while mumbling. There was just one bag, nothing else. She then shortly looked around the bedroom. The house she lived with Saito. It was nobody's, but a castle of two.....thinking, Louise let out her emotions.

"I'm really happy. This should be enough for me."

She should write something, a letter, so Saito would not worry. Louise took out a pen and paper. Thinking about something to write, Louise's mind was filled with various fantasies, substituting words, crying tears. Drop by drop, tears fell, the parchment wet with droplets.

Louise squeezed her brain for something, but she just thought of one line. If she tried to write anything more, her sadness would paralyse her body.

Placing the paper on the bed, hugging her bag, Louise opened the door and ran outside.

Anyhow, she must leave Des Ornières. As for the future, she would just ponder about it now. Louise ran to the stable, riding on Saito's horse.

"Sorry, but I'll find someone to return it to you later on.....for now just borrow it to me for a while."

She told Saito in her heart. Under the twin moons, Louise left, alone.

She must hurry. Hurry, and leave Des Ornières. She didn't know when sadness would take hold of her body and render her motionless again, if so, she couldn't move another inch.

The further she got from the house, the more her body felt like breaking apart.

Louise felt like fainting.....but she persevered, and rushed away in the dead of

the night.

This text is a machine translation (MTL).

Be warned that the degree of translation error may be higher than usual.

This page was created before the updated (July 19, 2015) MTL guidelines and has not been reviewed.

For details, see the machine translation guidelines.

Chapter 10: Elemental Siblings

When Henrietta returned to her own bedroom, Saito took a breather while in the underground bedroom. After staying there for about an hour, he left the room. The tunnel was so narrow, he had to bend down, and then he saw something on the floor.

“What the--slippers?”

The pair of slippers gave him an odd feeling. Is this not Louise’s? How could she have gotten here? Saito suddenly felt his blood run cold. Was it possible that she heard it all?

It must be. Louise came here and saw everything, from start to finish. Saito hurried along through the tunnel and hastily made his way to the bedroom on the second floor.

The door was not locked. Saito charged inside.

“What is going on?”

Louise’s clothes were scattered on the bed. *Thief?* The thought flashed for a moment.

No.

Louise’s bag was not here. On the bed was a piece of parchment, and Saito’s face turned an ashen pale. There was a single phrase written.

“I’m sorry.”

In that moment, Saito was ready to burst into tears. Just imagining the pain Louise must of felt when she saw him and Henrietta cooing affection for each other, and then leaving this note, made Saito dizzy. All her sentiments were

conveyed in two words, and Saito understood.

“That girl . . . after seeing me getting close with Princess . . . she wanted to give up.”

He knew her personality: stubborn, does not listen to reason, dead serious.

However, all she really wanted was for him to find happiness. If it was for him, she would not hesitate to sacrifice herself. Like at Romalia, she already gave her all to let Saito return to his home in his world . . .

And again this time: she probably believed that if she disappeared, then he would become happy.

Saito grabbed the handle of Derflinger and yanked him from the sheath.

“Derf! Where is Louise?”

“Huuh, what now? Hm, about an hour ago, Louise was crying--I don’t know why--and she packed up her luggage and ran out. Was there another fight?”

Saito, clutching Derflinger, rushed out of the room. When he arrived at the dining hall, he shook Siesta awake.

“Siesta! Have you seen Louise?”

“Nope . . . What happened?”

“It seems like she ran away.”

Siesta sighed. Then she stared with wide eyes at Saito, unable to take her eyes off.

“What did you do? Since you made Miss Valliere angry enough to run away, then surely you did something really unacceptable. Sure, she always throws tantrums, but it’s not like her to truly be this furious.”

Saito winced, “Let’s talk about this later. I have to go after her on horseback.”

“I am going to help--”

“No. Siesta, you will stay here. It is already late, it might be too dangerous.” Saito took an oil lamp off a table, used a candle flame to light it, and hurried outside. When he got to the stables, he discovered his horse was not there.

Louise rode it and left. Saito, enduring the torment of despair, started to dash onward.

“So, how’d you guys start fighting today?” Derflinger asked Saito from behind.

“It wasn’t a fight.”

“Then what was it?”

“It was my fault. Everything.”

Saito ran while it was dark. He was speculating on where Louise would possibly escape to. *Home? Or the Magic Academy? But if she wanted to really disappear, she wouldn’t go to those places.*

"I’m sorry."

Saito from those brief words on the parchment came to an understanding that Louise wanted to completely vanish from his eyes. From within, he did not blame himself, yet hated his own words. **(!)**

I must hurry. This is my only chance. If I cannot find her soon, it’s possible I won’t see her ever again.

“Even if you pursue after her so urgently, she might not be willing to see you. She was quite angry, no? Well, what is said doesn’t matter, she would eventually run away on an impulse,” Derflinger said in a carefree voice.

Saito could not answer. His mind was preoccupied with Louise.

“In addition, you can’t outrun a horse,” said Derflinger.

Despite the odds, Saito did not slow down his pace. His feet would not stop.

In an instant, a peaceful and contented life crumbled. It was not an ordinary way to spend time everyday.

It was a time when one has to diligently take good care of themselves.

It was too easy to lose Louise now, Saito had realized at last the circumstances. At the same time, he realized how much he loved Louise. Then he thought that he might of come to that conclusion too quickly . . .

No.

It is not being hasty.

I was enticed by the charms of Her Highness, it was my choice to kiss her. He told himself how fond he is of Louise's mouth, and so it was just Her Majesty's will to come together . . .

I really am the worst guy ever.

After thirty minutes of continuous jogging, Saito still could not see any sign of Louise. The open night sky covered everything in profound darkness. Only having an oil lamp to depend on while walking through the street was extremely challenging.

"Should I continue down the way I was heading? Or take the other path on this forked road? Maybe after seeing me give chase, she hid somewhere?"

He gathered his strength to go in the same direction, and he was beginning to get short of breath. The next moment, two noble horsemen appeared up ahead who were holding staves in front of them which were illuminated by magic. They appeared to be arguing about something, coming nearer.

"Really! How stupid is brother! You manage to lose things so easily!"

"Sorry . . ." said a young voice. He sounded similar to Saito's age. Excitedly, Saito stopped jogging in order to inquire them.

"Excuse me! I would like to ask something if you don't mind."

Saito noticed their exceptional capes, and the two nobles stopped their horses.

“What is the matter?” the young man asked. He was wearing a black, feather-plumed hat and a feathered cape.

“Have you seen a noble woman riding a horse pass by?”

The two, one a young man and the other a young woman, looked at each other.

“Was there someone who just recently came by?”

“Are you looking for a lady with long pink hair?”

In response to what the young noble described, Saito nodded.

“Yes, exactly! So she must of went on toward this direction.”

Wanting to continue the conversation with Saito, the nobles hollered for him to stop.

“Hey! Wait! Do you intend to go after her! We have missed her but an hour ago!”

“I intend to somehow catch up with her! Thank you!”

As Saito was starting to run again, the young noble immediately called out, “If you don’t mind, we can send you to the next relay station.”

The relay station was a place where horses could be rented for public use. A horse could be rented after paying some money.

With a firm voice, the female of the party raised a protest. She was wearing a shiny, gorgeous and a monochromatic black-and-white dress. A finished lace weave cloak surrounded her face. She looked like a beautiful doll.

“But now we’re in the middle of a task! This is exactly why I don’t like to go with you, Leu Leu brother! Really, another brother should have come along with me!”

Nevertheless, the young 'Leu Leu' still urged Saito.

“I insist.”

“Oh, thank you very much. However, you don’t have any issues? Don’t you still have work to do?”

“Since I lost something . . . I would like to go back again.”

The horses resuming cantering. It looked like the two people were brothers and sisters.

“It is just the same as when we didn’t have work! While we were on our journey, Leu Leu unexpectedly got sick in the stomach. There was nothing we could do, so I had no choice but to go alone.”

“Forgive me, Jeanette! After we arrive to Tristaina, I’ll buy you all the candy you want.”

When he was done speaking, a broad grin appeared Jeanette’s face.

“Well! You better!”

As the two were discussing, Saito anxiously stared ahead. Jeanette, noticing Saito was like this, said, “Bleu, why don’t you ask this guy?”

“But, that might not be an easy topic to talk about?”

“What are you saying? You carelessly lose things and you still dare speak against me!”

The dialogue was a bit peculiar, but Saito did not pay any attention to it. At the time he didn’t notice much.

After his younger sister made a point, Bleu seemed to have come to a decision. He turned his head towards Saito to ask him.

“May I ask you about something? I heard that nearby there is a noble known as Chevalier De Hira . . .”

Although the noble started to sound funny, but Saito kept it to himself.

“I guess that would be me.”

“Wah, what!”

It could be made out from Bleu’s face that he was quite startled.

“Well!”

Next to him, Jeanette also opened wide both of her eyes. Bleu showed a pleased expression to flaunt at Jeanette.

“See! Do you see this! Jeanette! I am special like this! When we are trapped Founder Brimir is always standing at my side!”

“You just have good luck, that’s all.”

“What is so great about finding me?”

Regarding to Saito’s confusion, Bleu, in an overdone nonchalant way, said, “So we could kill you!”

Saito’s body suddenly became rigid. So much that he felt it was only a joke. Next to him, Jeanette laughed cheerfully.

“So this is how it is. Only this guy. The most important part of that file that you forgot where you left behind. That, brother. You could take one glance at it and remember everything if this was all it described.”

“That wouldn’t work either. I’m kind of absent-minded.”

The siblings started to argue, and Saito stared blankly at them. They said they wanted to kill him, and now they suddenly are bickering with each other. He really could not make sense of the situation.

“Because it has to be like this, it seems that I have no option but to kill you. Please, if you can, do not offer resistance. It is inconvenient for both parties and will also be a waste of energy.”

“Uh-huh. If you are like an obedient lamb, then it will be just like going to sleep and you’ll be sent to the Founder."

Saito asked in a low voice, “So, you’re not really joking?”

“No.”

“I’ll ask again . . .”

“It’s quite a pity . . .”

When Bleu made that comment, Saito swiftly reacted. He leaned to one side, and immediately gripped at the handle of the katana that was hoisted at his waist, and swung the blade.

It was quicker to take the katana out compared to pulling out Derflinger from behind or taking out the pistol that hung from his jeans. Using the sword directly would be the fastest way to strike.

However, he could not see Bleu in front of him anymore. Effortlessly he had dodged Gandálfr’s lightning speed attack, and rose into the air. From horseback he didn’t even use magic, but simply leaped.

It was a frightening display of skill.

Bleu landed on the ground. Facing Saito, he was about to rush towards him when he felt a powerful gust of wind coming from his right, and Saito tumbled onto the ground. It was Jeanette’s wind magic attack.

“Nnnuuhh . . .”

“It’s clear that this swordsman, it seems, has already surpassed the majority of magicians.”

Bleu pulled out his staff. It seemed to be a kind of flexible, whip-like staff. With it in hand, he lifted the brim of his hat in a classy way. The face under the hat was someone similar in age to Saito. It can be said that he was quite the elegant gentleman. When he slightly rubbed his nose, his expression was wonderfully cute.

He really looked like one of those kids at the Magic Academy that was a noble official’s son, which made Saito feel unsure of what to do. But, he could not become careless. That cute little face just announced that he wanted to kill him, and it was evident he possessed formidable skill.

“Who are you!?” Saito turned over to stand up, using his katana for support.

“Should we tell him?” Bleu asked Jeanette.

“No way! Seriously! You are such an idiot!”

“Don’t call me an idiot! The other brothers used to be in charge of these things, so I just don’t remember the procedure!”

Then he turned to Saito, “My apologies. I cannot tell you. Anyway, that first strike was not bad! Looks like that legendary familiar stuff is true.”

Bleu’s face gradually became a smile. Saito felt that he had seen that kind of smile before. Oh yes, in the past he had seen this expression often in an arcade with those wrestling video games. He would use all his pocket money to play them. There were a ton of game addicts. Whenever these guys met a good opponent, they would have this kind of smile . . .

“Hey, Jeanette.”

“What!”

“Can’t you let me have some fun?”

“Even if I say no, you’ll just do whatever it is that’s in your head. Eh, I don’t care. After this our brothers will just scold you and it’ll all be your fault.”

“Of course that’ll happen. But you don’t have to care or get involved.”

Bleu turned towards Saito again.

“Very well. You, what’s your name? Hira . . . Hiragu . . . Hirago . . .”

“Hiraga.”

“Yes, that’s right! You’re Hirako. Your luck isn’t bad. It’s only a little, but you get to live for a while longer. And I’m different from my brothers, who are only interested in money. I purely enjoy fighting. Especially someone as challenging as you.”

“Our brothers do not just like money alone! Our brothers serve a greater

purpose!”

“You really are so noisy, and as far as I’m concerned it’s the same.” Bleu wrinkled his eyebrows.

During the random arguing, Saito could not launch an offensive. Bleu did not show any openings. Sweat dripped down his forehead.

“Eh? Why didn’t you attack? I obviously left a lot of opportunities . . . how unusual. Oh well! Then, let’s start from my side! C’mon!”

Bleu waved his whip-like staff. Saito distanced himself about 20 mails. He was on the alert for some type of ice-arrow magic. Within his view, the tip of the staff gathered magical energy, shining with pale rays of light, and it starting forming into a rough tree-like shape.

“Blade?!”

The huge tree-like blade was going for Saito’s head. In a critical moment, he jumped to the side and avoided the attack.

The strength of this “blade” could not be underestimated. The dust on the ground swirled into the air. If he used the katana to make an attack . . . the whole sword would probably shatter.

“Not bad. That was ‘only’ a blade. Although, it was a bit bigger than the usual. And about you! That was terrific! You’re the first to be able to dodge that attack!”

This is gonna get messy, thought Saito as he stuck his katana into the ground and unsheathed Derflinger from behind him.

“Oi, partner, looks like we came across a formidable opponent!”

“What’s with him . . . I’ve never seen as thick a magic “blade”. . . That guy has some extraordinary power.”

But . . . I cannot lose here. I must get a horse to find Louise. Thinking about this, Saito’s body was shaking.

The glowing runes on his left hand glowed intensely. When Bleu saw Saito like this, he grinned more gleefully.

“Excellent. Quite excellent. Worthy to be known as the swordsman that overwhelmed many mages. But . . .”

Saito concentrated on Bleu. He watched every move that he made. With the experience of countless battles, he was accustomed to predicting when his opponents would strike.

Not yet. Not yet. No, not yet.

Bleu proceeded to speak, “You, it seems, only know about the mages of light. Why is it that we mages for 6,000 years until the monarchy were above everyone else . . . for this reason, let me tell you. Square level, triangle level, all these levels do not mean much of anything. Let me teach you something. As your “mage assassin.””

Bleu raised his own “blade” up high.

Now.

Saito flung himself, charging directly towards Bleu’s chest. His right hand firmly held Derflinger and he swiped. In a split second Bleu reduced the size of his “blade” to block the assault.

A fierce sound exploded, with sparks and pale rays of magic clashing. Almost simultaneously, Saito retrieved the automatic pistol with his left hand. He loaded a cartridge into it.

He jabbed the gun’s muzzle into Bleu’s abdomen, then pulled the trigger. With invisible speed three consecutive rounds were shot out. His hand felt like it really hit the target. However, Bleu had not collapsed.

“Well done! Well done! Unexpectedly you put out a lovely sword-and-bullet combination attack! But regarding to that gun, we are experts on protecting

ourselves from them.”

Pop, a deformed bullet came out of Bleu’s abdomen and fell on the ground.

“Wha . . . !”

“This is the simplest method. In the area about to be hit, hardening that part of the body is good enough. With practice, it becomes second-nature.”

Saito suddenly tilted the pistol, firing at Bleu’s head. If he didn’t get rid of the enemy, the enemy would get rid of him. This kind of terrifying attack would overwhelm anyone. However, Bleu’s forehead flashed with a silver glow, and the bullet was flicked out. Until then, Saito continued to shoot in vain, but there was no opening, and Bleu using the ‘Harden’ technique deflected each one.

“It’s surprising that your gun can fire continuously! When did they come out with such a remarkable model!”

From Saito’s stunned hands, Bleu came toward him and abruptly seized the automatic pistol. It appeared that his gaze was transfixed on the weapon for a while, and then grinned at Saito.

“This looks like it has been elaborately wrought! It’s not bad! Can I have it?”

He was not kidding about it. The mood was like that of a casual conversation between friends. Saito could tell from his tone, he had not revealed the true reason for wanting it **(!)**

“You taking my gun . . .”

Saito grabbed Derflinger with both hands and slashed with all his might. Bleu moved backwards a little, avoiding the sharp point.

“If you weren’t a familiar, you wouldn’t be able to move so fast, and in my opinion your achievements are just third-rate. The cream of the crop would be someone who uses magic as well as I.”

Once more, he lifted up his “blade” and it was expanding rapidly.

“All of my power is going into this spell!”

The huge “blade edge” was brought down onto Saito. But, Saito was not going to wait an eternity, and dodged it. While in the middle of evasion, he inquired Derflinger.

“That guy . . . why does he have to move so fast! I can’t hit him at all!”

“There are those who are like that . . . In the long history of mages, some guys are born to fight. . . Basically, you’ve got really bad luck this time.”

“Even so, attaining that kind of speed is inhuman!”

Thinking that the attack was avoided, Bleu still brought down the “blade.” The force blew Saito rolling onto the ground.

“Aww. Aww! Don’t tell me it’s all over!”

Saito sprung onto his feet. No big deal, it was only a scratch. However, the next time could still be highly unpredictable.

“Eh?,” at this moment, Derflinger said in a low-voice.

“What is it, Derf?”

“Originally, it was like this. During when the “first life” was made. Well, granted that it was so, but after all, that is how they become so strong.” **(!)**

“What are you talking about?”

The giant “blade” spell that smothers. The unnatural leaps of evasion.

“It’s not complicated, see. That guy’s body, if I’m correct, is not his true original body. Foot . . . wrist . . . knee . . . elbow . . . there’s an ace up his sleeve. All these parts, had magic applied to the “first life.” Thus they have the ability to move so fast. But, who would do these things?”

“Stop trying to escape!” Bleu’s impatient cry could be heard.

Derflinger’s words exposed the truth, and it allowed Saito to keep a level-head. Now, the smallest movements of the opponent were seen through clearly, as he dodged attack.

“Well, if we know the reason, then there’s a way. Even if you’re an elf, you still wouldn’t be able to achieve such fine control. It’s like using a dragon’s flames to toast bread. It would just turn into ash.”

“Then, what should I do?”

“Alright, I will absorb his magic. Using this opportunity, you go get that sword that’s from whatever country, and rush to stab him. Although, that guy’s magic power is weird . . . It’s excessively powerful. I can’t be certain . . .”

“You can’t be certain about what?!”

“Well, there’s no choice. Try to kill him, alright?”

Saito inched toward the katana stuck in the dirt.

“Hey, hey! Don’t tell me you’re trying to run away!” In a moment, Bleu waved his “blade.”

Derflinger shouted unexpectedly. “Partner! Now! Stick me into the ground!”

Saito did as he was told, and thrusted Derflinger into the earth.

“What!?” Bleu let out an astonished sound. Right away, his own magic “blade” was steadily sucked in with a ‘whoosh’ by Derflinger.

Saito flung himself towards the standing katana.

“Screw him good, Derf!”

“Yuh--your . . . it’s clear this is not just any sword!” Bleu’s leisurely facial expression disappeared. The next moment, he took something out from his chest. Indeed, it was a bottle containing some liquid. Sensing what it was, Derflinger yelled out.

“This is BAD! Partner! Hurry!”

“Eh?”

Just as Saito was going to charge into Bleu, he stopped in his tracks. The next instant, Bleu exhausted the whole bottle. Then, he emitted a deafening roar.

“RUUUUOOOOOAAAAA!”

The range of the “blade” increased two-fold in an instant. Incredulously, Saito stared at it. It began to burst out with power.

The “blade”, like a python, started to wreck Bleu’s surroundings. If anyone were to rush into it at this point, even Gandálfr would not be able to withstand it. There were no openings to break into.

However, even though the “blade” was a chaotic hurricane now, Derflinger unceasingly continued to absorb it.

Tch.

Saito noticed a crack appeared on Derflinger’s surface.

“Derf?”

“Listen well, partner. When I’m done absorbing all of his magic, use your sword to chop him up. Got it?”

“Hey, hey! Stop it!”

Saito became aware of the situation that was shifting slowly, not towards his favor.

The crack on Derflinger’s surface continued to grow larger. Unable to restrain his emotions, Saito threw himself at Derflinger. However, the energy waves from the “blade” magic sent him flying.

“I can’t stand . . . I can’t bear it. I’m afraid that because of the drug, this guy’s power is too much . . . It seems like my body cannot resist much longer.”

“Derf!”

“Don’t. Although our time together was short, but I am truly happy. Living for

six millenium really has its advantages.”

“Stop casting! Stop casting your spell! Derf!” cried Saito.

The frantic, uncontrolled magical “blade” began to swell. Derflinger’s sword body was slowly splitting apart.

“You had better apologize to the arrogant young lady.”

When the moment came that the immense “blade” was fully absorbed . . . *Bang!* As if coming from inside and the magic energy reached critical levels, Derflinger exploded into millions of bits and fragments.

Bleu received the force of the explosion and flew out, eventually landing on the ground.

From the sky, like little specks of stardust, the fragments of Derflinger slowly floated downwards, and Saito could only stare at them stupefied.

What had just happened did not register in his brain. The whole world, in a split second simply froze.

Suddenly, a hotness flowed into his cheeks. Finally, Saito recovered from the shock. With a calmness that was cultivated from battle, which didn’t give Saito any chance to soak in his grief, he spoke faintly about the present situation:

“Derf died.

“Derf . . . You bastard . . . I thought I told you to stop . . .”

Containing indescribable grief, the runes on Saito’s left hand erupted in a radiance never seen before, made brighter by the dark night. It looked like his whole hand was shining, and holding firmly to the katana, the blade reflected out scattered rays of light.

“I clearly told you to stop!”

From the past, during the battle with Wardes, Derflinger’s words echoed in Saito’s mind.

'Gandálfr's source of power is feelings! Anger! Sadness! Love! Pleasure! Anything is good! And now you seem to be really shaken, my Gandálfr!'

He was a snarky, slow and muddled partner.

But even so, when trapped, he always could find a way out.

After all, how many times had he helped Saito?

After all, how many times had he saved Saito?

“I don’t want to be shaking like this!” Saito howled.

The blown away Bleu had recovered at last and stood up. The blast still left him a bit dizzy.

“That was really an outstanding sword . . . he actually sucked up all my magic . . . what a pain in the ass.”

While Bleu was shaking his head, from twenty mails away, Saito holding the katana charged at him. *What, with my speed I can still make it even from this distance!*

Saito was running fast enough that to him, Bleu looked like he was immobile. Undaunted, Bleu raised his arm and started to chant a spell.

. . . by that guy . . .

Derf was killed by that guy.

His body was light and graceful like a long wing, the opposite to his heavy laden heart. He was unable to hold back the tears that were rising forth. A fierce, unstoppable emotion was inside him, the feeling that it was too easy to lose close friends, and Saito knew this well.

If only I tried harder.

If only I was stronger.

If only I was more. If only I was better. If only I was greater . . .

'Wow, amazing. I look down on you. You are a "useless familiar."'

'But, don’t worry partner. I’ll help you by absorbing the spells! That’s me, Gandálfr’s left hand: Derflinger!'

'Partner, go above the ship. It’s a blind spot, where the cannons can not reach.'

'Don’t just stand around. Blocking that tornado is your job. Gandálfr.'

'Hey, lady, when I give you the signal, just pull the lever down there below the seat. That’s the latest weapon that Mr. Colbert installed.'

'Partner, you are were always very brave.'

'Have confidence. You are strong. Just listen to my instructions now. Follow them, all right? If you do so, you can surely win.'

'This fellow is like that. She has the movements of an assassin.'

'Cast that 'Dispel' on me!'

All of what Derflinger had said in the past flashed by in less than a second. Saito took a leap and during that moment, Derflinger’s words pushed through his head once more.

'Don’t forget! I’m not the one fighting! I am just a sword!'

What are you saying. You’re not just a sword.

He was a partner that always gave reliable advice. It did not matter what time of day it was, he was always an amusing, fun friend.

During Saito’s proud moments; chaotic times; cheerful memories; sorrowful moments; even on the brink of death, he was always by his side.

But, he has already passed on.

A wild, animalistic roar came out from Saito. It was the sound of great sorrow. The indescribable emotions made his heart fill with rage, as his runes were shining ever brighter. The glowing hand held the sword; from handle to tip the katana's edge had a marvelous luster. This light no doubt shows that he has been greatly affected by this one fact:

Derf was gone.

Right when Bleu was gathering on the staff tip the magic for a "blade" attack . . . Saito ran even faster, aiming at Bleu's chest.

"Whuh . . . now he's faster than me?"

Saito practically wanted to bury the whole sword into him, and he stabbed the katana into Bleu's abdomen.

"Derf. You're really an idiot."

Jeanette either did not want Saito to finish victoriously, or she was stricken with grief.

The next moment, Saito felt a blow to his head, and he toppled onto the ground.

Oh, right.

There was still another enemy. In the remote parts of his mind, Saito cursed himself many times.

Seeing both her older brother and Saito lying on the ground, Jeanette gasped.

"What a fool. I can't imagine how he's my brother. How about I just leave him lying here . . ."

Even saying this, Jeanette held her unconscious brother, and starting treating the sword wound with magic. It was evident that the wound was fatal, but it gradually closed up. That was the astonishing power of water magic.

While trying to get her fallen brother onto a horse, Jeanette glanced at Saito sprawled on the ground.

“You chose life.”

She looked at the letter in her hand. While the two were in combat, the brother’s familiar delivered it. It contained some writing:

“To beloved Jeanette: You and Bleu are doing fine? In that case, I pray your ‘work’ has not been completed. Just recently Jack contacted us, and apparently the client is unable to garner enough funds. Stop what you are doing, and return immediately. We have prepared for you nice, hot soup.

Born with a purpose,

-Damien”

“Seriously . . . we don’t work for free. Ah, was the down payment received already? But even then, it’s not worth the effort.”

Mumbling to herself, Jeanette mounted her horse.

“Well, in this place it’s hard to find business.”

Epilogue

In the chapel, a silver haired girl held her hands together in prayer, facing the delicately carved Founder statue and praying in silence.

This person gave others the appearance of a pure maiden like from a dream.

Under the long hair that shined like finished cotton sateen, her eyes that were brimming with admiration for one person were closed tightly. Her unwavering appearance was exactly like a beautiful statue.

Through the magnificent stained-glass windows, the rays of light that shined into the chapel enveloped the maiden with a heavenly glow. A respectively beautiful statue.

From the looks of her petite body that was wrapped in nun’s robes and her youthful face, her age seemed to be around 15 or 16 years. Different from the zealous prayers of dedicated believers, there was not even a single word of prayer coming out of her mouth. For her, this was merely as if breathing, a peaceful, gentle prayer. Gazing out from the chapel windows, there was a vast expanse of open ocean.

Here was the Saint Margaret monastery, located outside of northwestern Gallia on a protrusion of land the area of two square li (1 kilometer), on the pointed end of a thirty square li (15 kilometer) or so peninsula.

The whole peninsula was almost entirely situated on a rocky cliff.

The monastery did not have a road connecting to the outside world, and if someone wanted to leave here they would need the assistance of a boat or a flying beast, so to speak.

This was even more than just ideology, and even if the monastery was isolated from the world, about thirty nuns were living there. **(!)**

When the chapel doors were pushed open, several maidens dressed in the same style of nun's robes walked inside. After they saw the silent, silver haired girl praying, one person among them spoke in a loud voice.

"Sigh, meeting time has not even started, yet Sister Josette has already begun to pray."

Like as if they discovered an extremely amusing quirk, the maidens started chattering and making noise. This is also no wonder, since in a monastery disconnected from the rest of the world, it can be said that there was not much else to do. From being confined to this peninsula, it was hard for the maidens to find anything that didn't seem 'out of the ordinary.'

"Do you know what she is praying about?"

After a maiden was done speaking, a gleam flashed on the eyes of the red haired girl next to her.

"Do I have to say it? Of course she's praying for someone to come here!"

"Goodness, if the abbess finds out it could be disastrous!"

The maidens all laughed.

"Why? This is not something that should be criticized, after all, since that guest is Romalia's high priest, and he can bring us guidance, and he is one to be respected, right? There is nothing wrong with Sister Josette hoping for him to come, and among us, she is the one who knows him best."

Upon hearing this, the peacefully praying Josette could not tolerate it, and she opened her eyes.

"Don't speak of this matter so impolitely."

"This isn't good, Sister Josette heard us."

Of course it was hard not to hear such loud talking, they spoke loudly on purpose to entertain themselves.

"Brother[1] is a kind-hearted person. So, he brings to us bored-to-death women

news of the cities and towns and all kinds of snacks. That's all. Thinking that he has some special attachment to me is really rude."

"Hey, hey, hey? Sister Josette, no one said anything about having a 'special attachment' to you, I only said 'she is the one who knows him best.'"

Josette's face quickly flushed a deep red.

"Sister Josette turned into an apple! And she happens to be freshly picked, a red, sweet apple!"

The maidens laughed another round. The embarrassed Josette firmly held onto the holy relic necklace that hung on her neck.

This sacred silver relic . . . from since she could remember was always with her.

According to the abbess, when she was abandoned at the front door of the town shelter and in a box crying, that relic was already with her. The abbess found her by chance, and unable to hold back her pain, she brought Josette back to the monastery.

This holy relic . . . Josette never had taken it off even once. Bathing, sleeping, no matter what she was doing she was not permitted to take it off, this was the abbess's command.

It was not just Josette alone, all the maidens who lived in the monastery had to abide with this rule.

If they did anything like that . . . then they would immediately lose the Founder's trust, and once that happened then their life would be terminated ---- this was what they were told.

Although in the remote Saint Margaret monastery the rule was not strictly enforced, as that was the only rule set up in the secure monastery located at the national border, but it was still followed. **(!)**

Her hands tightly closed around the sacred relic that resembled herself, Josette then breathed slower and more calmly. Turning a blind eye to the clamorous ladies next to her, she walked out toward the outer chapel. (!)

Next to the chapel were the dormitories built from stone. The chapel and the dorms were all that there was. This was a small, insignificant monastery.

Beyond the walls that protected against wind, was the vast ocean. Looking from one side to another, in between the gaps of the rising and falling rocks, were several cleared plots of land for small-scale farming. There were kekanaiba ( ) rice plants that were certainly resistant to the dampness and wind, carelessly swaying in the sea breeze. Other than the rare visit from the priest the monastery supported a nearly self-sufficient way of life.

Compared to the rest of the world, this place was a tiny . . . tiny, negligible place.

Josette gazed up at the sky.

Her life obviously similar to a prisoner's, an innocent smile appeared on her pretty face.

As she knew absolutely nothing of the outside world, she did not have much freedom with what she ate and with social interactions.

Besides . . . the way she was now, she finally learned the "joy" of waiting.

Twirling her fingers, Josette tried to figure out when he would arrive.

Once, twelve days ago . . . he said, probably tomorrow or the day after they could meet again.

Thinking and speculating, a new kind of feeling welled in her heart, a restless and anticipation filled her up.

From the ocean surface a strong gust blew at Josette's cloak.

Her silver hair was floating on the wind, gradually blending into the breeze.

Two weeks later, a wind dragon descended upon the monastery's courtyard. Alone in the narrow courtyard, space already became tight. From the dormitory,

an elderly abbess came out to welcome the guest.

“Long time no see, Mama.”

The young person wearing the priest robes of Romalia . . . no, his face simply still showed the remnants of the radiance of youth. Although he had light golden hair that dazzled and sparkled, his eyes that were both different colors, called “moon eyes,” brewed an unsafe aura.

It was Julio.

After having respectfully lowered his head as a courteous act, the abbess took on a bewildered expression.

“Reverend Cardinal Deacon.”

When he was called by the rank that the palace of Romalia had bestowed on him, Julio laughed and looked at the abbess.

“What is it?”

“Even though you have just graced us with your presence, but please forgive my boldness, we do not welcome foreign visitors.”

“But I am the high priest of Romalia,” as if suggesting that this answer was enough, Julio said. Considering their positions in the monastery, Julio was a far cry from this abbess. Furthermore, Julio was not an ordinary Cardinal Deacon, but a priest that served the Pope.

The priest of the right hand of the Pope was not going to let an abbess deny his existence.

“It has to be this way, seeing how you are related to the Founder’s most respected servant then we are at a complete loss. As you know, this place is isolated from the secular world, a religious establishment in order for the orphaned maidens to get closer to God and the Founder . . .”

The abbess’s voice was mixed with a hint of dread. She had no knowledge of Gallia’s current events. Romalia’s war, King Joseph’s death, as his niece Charlotte succeeded the throne . . .

Rumor had it, that Charlotte was only Romalia's puppet. With Romalia's priest had having such a complicated identity coming to visit . . . surely something unsettling was going to happen, and the idea of it was reasonable.

"Please do not worry, there is nothing that will happen that would disturb you in any way. I am just following the Pope's orders, to express profound gratitude for your pious and life's sacrifice, and also for faithful friendship."

Julio, who was finished speaking, took out a leather bag and handed it to the abbess. It was crammed with sparkling gold coins. With one hand she made a holy gesture, [2] and the abbess accepted the leather bag with the other. **(!)**

At the same time, she could not help but shudder a bit.

"Please be sure to pass on to the Pope my deepest gratitude. I am old and weak and of the ignorant generation, and because I pity the orphaned maidens, so I try to encourage them to serve god(s) together with me . . ."

"I understand, I understand completely, Mama!"

As if wanting to comfort the old abbess, Julio patted her shoulder.

"I was also raised in an orphanage. Your deeds are truly worthy of praise and admiration. The reason why I came here, is only because I want to fulfill the dreams and desires of those ones who are like sisters to me."

When they noticed that the wind dragon and Julio had arrived, all the maidens poured out from the dormitories to gather around him.

"Brother! This time what kind of stories are you going to tell us?"

All the girls in a campfire fashion circled around Julio.

"How impolite! Such children! Do not forget that you have given yourselves up for God! Have you not noticed the Reverend Cardinal Deacon's confusion?"

Even faced with chastising from the abbess, there was no indication that the excitement of the maidens had gone down even a little. With a helpless expression the abbess had no other alternative but to make the holy gesture. **(!)**

This was not surprising. The maidens who had been left alone, having come here for reasons of their own, and getting them to have a strong faith from their inner hearts naturally had some difficulties, considering that so far they had experienced bitterness, and returning to past hobbies was a temptation. The lively mood was understandable.

Julio laughing affably, he asked a question for the maidens.

“In a little bit I will share stories, but first, where’s Josette?”

The girls appearing to understand to some extent started whispering in each other’s ears.

“Where could she be? Or would it be inconvenient for Mister to find her himself?”

Soon after there was a burst of chattering again. Julio nodded his head and walked toward the chapel. In the monastery, there was no other place to search.

A silver haired girl, kneeling on both knees, was praying. Even when Julio pushed the door open and walked in the chapel, the maiden continued praying indifferently. Stealthily approaching the girl from behind, Julio stroked the girl’s long hair that slipped out from her cloak on one side. In quite an affectionate way he played around with his finger.

“Touching a nun’s hair would send you to hell,” the solemn and grave voice of Josette said.

“If I had a chance to stroke your beautiful, silver hair, what harm is there even if I would go to hell?”

“Oh! What a day of great judgment! **(!)** How can I believe that this came from the mouth of the High Priest!”

Josette facing the front went on to pray as before, with not a bit of desire to turn her head.

“What is making you upset?”

“Upset? Are trying to blow me off? Why am I so upset? You are right about me being upset. Before you would come see me every two weeks, but now I don’t know why I’ve been separated from you for a month. But, this isn’t something worth getting angry over, after all, it’s plenty of fun here.” [3]

“I have a lot of work.”

“I know. But when the usual routine gets mixed up, then it takes away the joy in waiting for something.”

Finally at this point Josette stood up, then a slow smile crept up her face and she threw herself into Julio's arms.

"Brother."

"Aren't you supposed to be all mad at me?"

"Yes, but now I don't care anymore. Who else can make brother be my favorite person?"

After their embrace, Josette tightly squeezed Julio's hand.

This priest of Romalia . . . Julio's first visit was six months ago. Apparently he was searching for monasteries in various regions, on a missionary journey. The far and remote Saint Margarita monastery had captured his interest. Perhaps he pitied that he almost never reached out toward fellow sisters.

After that, every so often he could be seen coming here. In the beginning, her relationship was not that intimate.

It was just that Josette was a girl who always looked forward to listening to Julio's sermons. Then, the sermons gradually became the stories he heard from towns and cities, and the first time that Julio was about to leave, he secretly told Josette:

"From now on, I will come for you."

As for being somewhat attracted to Julio, Josette had not the slightest clue. Compared to similar aged girls, she appeared young, the characteristic curves of a woman not quite distinct. Hair color, was a silver that was almost white.

Since she was a child, Josette was always self-conscious of her hair that was different from everybody else's. *It's just like old grandma hair,* she would always think.

Naturally, it was simply because she and the abbess had the exact same hair color.

Why, all the other girls get to have gorgeous blonde hair, blazing red hair or even midnight black hair, I'm the only one with this bland hair color.

However, Julio admired her hair.

“What kinds of tales have you brought for me today?” her eyes shining, Josette asked.

Indeed, in this monastery, she and Julio were the closest of friends, however they were not in a romantic relationship according to rumors. Brother and sister . . . it was that kind of relationship (T/L: “approximately in the same category”). Even if orphaned Josette never had a brother, surely this kind of feeling was as if she did.

“Today, there’s something very important.”

“Something important?”

What could it be?

Could it be that, he would pronounce his love?

If it was then that should be a good thing. But, Julio was the high priest, and she was a nun, it would never happen. It was equal to betraying God. As long as Josette was on earth she did not understand the private affairs priests, merely according to doctrine, she believed two people were destined to never have love. **(!)**

“Please continue.”

Josette looked straight into Julio’s eyes; the “moon eyes” that seemed to be able to snatch away a soul. A delicate face. Even though she did not see him often, Josette was captivated by Julio’s good looks.

Julio took something out from his pocket.

“. . . A ring?”

Embedded in it was a yellowish, earthly gem; it was a somewhat underwhelming ring.

“Is this for me?”

However, Julio had not replied. With an earnest gaze, he was simply looking at Josette.

“Try it on.”

“It’s a little bit big.”

Indeed, just as Josette had said the ring really was too big.

“It’s alright, the surface has been enchanted with magic.”

Upon hearing Julio saying this, Josette put it on. It then tightened . . . it was incredible that this happened . . . the ring slowly shrunk, until it was the perfect width for Josette’s finger.

“How amazing . . .”

With Josette staring wide-eyed at the ring, Julio smiled.

“Remember when you said you couldn’t use magic?”

“Of course, I am not born from an aristocratic background. But, this kind of thing is not impossible.”

This topic was discussed often among fellow companions. During the short amount of free time they had before going to bed, the maidens would make wild guesses about their backgrounds amongst themselves. *Relying on limited clues, I was found in Lucia? (), so perhaps I’m an illegitimate daughter of a great lord* . . . and so on. *Somewhere on my clothes there is some coat of arms belonging to some lord,* etcetera. Of course, everyone knew that the theories were complete nonsense, but no one wanted to be the person that ruined the fun.

“What is so special about this ring?”

“This ring was once worn by a ruler of a kingdom. After he died from being drawn into an explosion, my sharp-sighted Azuro eventually picked up this ring.”

“Wow, you sure like cracking jokes.”

At this Julio simply burst out in laughter (). He really was a loud guy. Josette was somewhat bewildered of this . . .

“Are you serious you can give me something this precious?”

“Well . . . actually, it’s not yet certain that this would be yours. But, if it really is for you then it would be quite excellent, I think,” Julio implied.

Josette looked at the ring again. It was a deep, thick colored and beautiful stone. She wasn’t sure if this ring really belonged to a king before.

What is so important about wearing this ring?

Staring at the gemstone, Josette gradually began to feel a tender kind of feeling.

It was peaceful yet unsettling, mixed with anticipation for the unimaginable.

Although, I still would prefer to hear a proposal of love from him, the thought flashed by.